

FINDING COMMON MISSION AMONG A SEGMENTED CHURCH FAMILY

A THESIS-PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

Making disciples is the central mission of the Church. While spiritual growth and discipleship is a personal exercise with the Lord, every local church has a responsibility to provide platforms for the growth of its disciples. Bethel Presbyterian Church in Cornelius North Carolina is a two-hundred-year-old church that takes this mission seriously. This project will articulate and implement this discipleship process through five key ministry areas: worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach, and will focus on uniting and prospering a church segmented by generational association, generational age, and generational approach through this expressed mission of intentional process-discipleship.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

A Survey of Bethel Presbyterian Church

In five short years, 2028, Bethel Presbyterian Church will celebrate its two hundredth anniversary as a church community. While that kind of birthday may seem young by European church standards, there are few American churches that can boast such an age. Remarkably throughout its two-hundred-year history, Bethel has remained spiritually healthy, vibrant, and relevant to the surrounding community of North Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

Notable historical moments include the very first meeting on the grounds that were donated to the church on January 8, 1829.¹ Reverend Thomas Espy was called as Bethel's first pastor in July that same year. In September, Bethel elected its first four elders and erected the rock wall around the cemetery that still stands today. In 1830, the first building was erected by Bethel members and their slaves, who were also part of the ninety-member congregation. A gallery was constructed in the rear of the church for the slaves to gather for worship. A significant donation of property was given by a member of Bethel for the establishment of a Presbyterian college in Mecklenburg County. That plantation property was given in honor of General William Lee Davidson by his son, Colonel William Lee Davidson for the institution we now know as Davidson College. The school opened its doors in 1837.

In 1895 the congregation decided to build a new church sanctuary designed by Rev. Dr. J.D. Grier. It was a modest sixty by forty feet in size. The first service was held on January 17, 1896, and ten short years later Dr. Grier concluded his ministry at Bethel. In 1928 Bethel celebrated one hundred years with six hundred twenty-one people in attendance. A new Sunday School building was erected in the rear of the Sanctuary in 1949. On June 1, 1951 a new supply preacher was called and a little over a year later, on July 27, 1952 Rev. John Edwin (DiDi)

¹ Ann Moretz, *The History of Bethel Presbyterian Church* (Cornelius, NC: Bethel Presbyterian Church, n.d.) See Appendix C. The document is widely distributed among this congregation.

Weyland Jr. was installed as Bethel's stalwart twentieth-century pastor. When Lake Norman began to fill in 1963 the area began to expand and so did Bethel's ministry. A new educational wing was constructed in 1967. Rev. Weyland served as Bethel's pastor until his retirement in 1995.

Changes, while anathema to most church people, are inevitable, and the past two decades of life at Bethel has brought many new movements and changes. It is said that as a pastor in a new church, you never want to follow a beloved pastor, you want to follow the guy that follows the beloved pastor. Rev. Rob Hinman, Rev. Bill Cain, and Rev. Tom Boone, as well as several interim and transitional pastors have taken the call, but Weyland's shadow still hangs over the congregation. Such was the case for Bill Cain, who was universally admired and respected. While not following Rev. Weyland directly, he helped heal the divides and fissures that erupted after Weyland's retirement.

It was during Rev. Cain's tenure that Bethel made one of the most consequential decisions of its history, to leave its beloved denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA). The PC (USA) was a product of a merge between the Northern and Southern Presbyterian churches, a move that was over one-hundred-years in the making after the Southern States surrendered to their "Northern aggressors." Alas, if there could be peace between Washington D.C. and Richmond, Virginia, there ought to be peace between Presbyterians in N.Y. and Presbyterians in N.C. The denomination was officially formed on June 10, 1983, but had already seen defections even before it set out to create a union. The Presbyterian Church in America broke off from the Southern church in 1973 and shortly after the union in 1983 the Evangelical Presbyterian Church made its debut and carved off another segment of the Reformed body. That was saddening, but not stifling as the newly formed Presbyterian Church of the United States of America began to carve its own progressive pathway through the world.

Fast forward to 2013 when Bethel decided to join a growing number of Presbyterian churches forming a new movement called "A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO)." This new denomination more accurately expressed the evangelical character of the

people of Bethel. “Evangelical” is a term that can be characterized by four key indicators: 1) an emphasis on the changed life (conversionism) 2) an emphasis on mission both in sharing the Gospel and social activism (activism) 3) the centrality of Scripture (biblicism) 4) the centrality of Jesus’ sacrifice the cross (crucicentrism).² In 2013, an overwhelming majority of Bethel members prayerfully discerned the issues facing the church and voted to move their affiliation from the PC (USA) to ECO. While several families did find the shift unsettling and decided to move their membership, Bethel found its footing with denominational convictions that more closely represented its core membership’s faith in the evangelical tenets.

After Rev. Bill Cain left Bethel in 2016, there was a season of sadness. It took more than a year to find a new pastor. When that pastor arrived, he brought change at breakneck speed. Many people who were disheartened at Cain’s departure found no comfort in the new pastor’s arrival and desire for rapid change. After two short years came the Covid-19 pandemic. It is impossible to speak about ministry in the 2020’s without reference to the Covid lockdowns. They changed everything. Some church worship centers were closed for over a year. Bethel was one of those, though it did seek to minister to people through recorded and outdoor services. The growing unease with the lead pastor coupled with an impossible Covid situation became untenable and 2021 Bethel found itself seeking yet another new pastor.

The interim period at Bethel between pastors was another lengthy season. The pastor who came to serve kept a steady course. While many wanted the ship to be righted and reforms put in place, this pastor understood that maintaining stability was the priority. As most churches tend to do in seasons of transition, there was a decline at Bethel during the interim. Once the Pastor Nominating Team was finally established the process went swiftly and a new pastor began serving in February 2023.

² D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Unwin Hyman Ltd., 2002), 3.

The Segments

The Apostle Paul wrote to a church in Corinth that was segmented along lines of leadership and personality. He chastised those Christians for allowing themselves to be segmented in this pernicious way:

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor.³

Every congregation has its various segments of people. Some segments are similar to what was happening in first century in Corinth where people followed the teachings of one leader over and against another. Other segments break out along generational lines. It is along these generational lines that I have observed the segments at Bethel primarily in three areas: 1) generational association 2) generational age 3) generational approach.

Generational Association

Longevity of membership at Bethel is a kind of badge of honor. I like to joke with pastor friends that Bethel is almost two hundred years old, and we still have charter members planning the celebration. But in truth, there are eighty- and ninety-year-olds who were baptized as infants in this fellowship. They have seen all the changes in the community and in the church. A couple of weeks ago while I was helping to paint at a workday event, a longtime member approached me and said, “You know, I helped paint the steeple on this church.” I said, “That’s amazing! One day I’ll tell people that I helped paint the women’s bathroom in the Sunday School wing in the basement.”

³ 1 Corinthians 3:1-8

There is a long line of families at Bethel who have poured their hearts and lives into its ministry success. A passing glance at the gravestones in the cemetery reveals the rich history of the church and its profound influence on the town of Cornelius and the region of Lake Norman. Many roads, schools, parks, neighborhoods, and areas of the region are named after people buried on Bethel's property. It is not simply that people have been at Bethel for a long time, it is that their family line built this community and remains an influence to this day. They are the legacy. They are the keepers of the history of the church and the community. They are the essence of Bethel. This bears the question- who are the people who have come to Bethel recently in the past twenty or thirty years, or even in the past few months? It's a segmented population, but this does not necessarily need to divide the congregation. Honoring this generational dedication while seeking to grow new families outside of that segment is key.

Invisible Centers of Power

This dynamic can feel uncomfortable at times, especially for those families who do not have the same generational legacy at Bethel. The segment is palpable as you walk through the cemetery, or as you look through the directory. Yet while the segment exists, it need not be a division in the work and mission of the church.

The good news is that this generational association does not wield power in the church as overtly as it seems to be articulated here. Bethel is a beloved community, and there is a genuine desire to see God honored, Christ glorified, and disciples made. The shadow of certain long-time families exists, as they would in any similar situation, but they are not unhealthy shadows. They exist much like the old oak trees in the parking lot and front lawn. They are part of Bethel's history and part of the future of the church. While a given historical family may not sit in a position of leadership per se, they possess deep rooted historical investment in the spiritual and institutional success of the church. Their opinion and wisdom matter and should be sought after when making consequential changes to the church.

Generational Age

Sometimes the church flourishes when birds of a feather flock together, when young people find synergy and older generations can commiserate with one another. Young parents gather for play dates and focus their Bible studies on life-stage topics. Parents of teenagers pray together for their students and for their own sanity. Empty nesters plan trips together because they have the time and money to do so. There can be real fellowship among congregations segmented along generational lines, but there is a missed opportunity when those lines become hard and fast segmentations. Bethel is not alone in this phenomenon where people simply feel more comfortable in their own generational age bracket.

Christian Education and Study

Christian education is a highly valued piece of Bethel's ministry, and Bethel to its credit, has continued to offer a robust Sunday School program in the face of changing cultural trends. Sunday School classes at Bethel are segmented by generational age. Friendships are formed in these classes that spill over into life outside the church. And while families and individuals may worship alongside each other, taking that brief moment to shake hands and say, "Good morning," deep, intergenerational fellowship is mostly lacking. Currently there are four main adult classes that meet on Sunday mornings for instruction and study, and they are segmented by age.

The Mosaic class is a group of mostly Generation X individuals who think they are still young adults. There is a round robin of teachers and the class meets in a large classroom setting in a semi-circle with the teacher at the front. They have been together for over a decade, but still consider themselves the "new" class. They focus on teaching through the Scriptures and desire to dive deeper than the surface level understanding.

The Logos class meets in the Fellowship Hall, outfitted with round tables for convenience in notetaking, since the class is taught by one retired pastor and several of what many consider to be more scholarly teachers. The attendance is comprised mostly of retirees in

their 60's and 70's, the parents of the Mosaic class. Since the majority of the class attends the later service, there are no issues getting started promptly or finishing in time to make it to the service for a bit of fellowship. They utilize technology like Zoom to facilitate students who are unable to attend in-person.

Hub Knox is one of those names everyone at Bethel should know. He was a Sunday School teacher for a hundred years (or what seemed like it) and as a result, there is now a class called the Hub Knox class. It meets in the Hub Knox room. The folks who attend the class are mostly chronically gifted, long-time members of the church. One anomaly with this particular class is that it is currently taught by a beloved forty-something-year-old man who is establishing his own legacy of cross-generational ministry.

The Young Adult class is new. In an attempt to galvanize some of the many young adults who attend Sunday morning gatherings, a class was created to target the life stage of those between twenty and forty. Even this spread feels large as some in the class are single post-college students and others are young, married, and brand-new parents. The class has been in session for four weeks and usually has between two and four students. If everyone showed up at the same time who has attended so far, the number would be closer to twelve.

Life Groups

Fellowship is an essential ingredient of any healthy congregation, and Bethel is strong in its fellowship. One of the ways it provides platforms for building friendships is through Life Groups. These are groups that meet away from the church campus in people's homes or restaurants. Often there is some study or devotional lesson, a time for prayer, lots of chatter, and of course, food. Food is one of the main draws, and this is a biblical idea. For some it might be food and wine, but there is most always some kind of refreshment.

Like the Sunday School ministry, life groups tend to segment themselves by generational age and life stage. There may be slight crossovers at the edges, like a couple in their early sixties, pre-retirement, meeting with other couples in their late seventies, but mixing

of a wider age group is not normal. This is not a negative either way, it is simply the current setting at Bethel.

Presbyterian Women

Another fellowship opportunity at Bethel is the Presbyterian Women. The men get together on occasion, but they are not nearly as organized as the women. The Presbyterian Women elect and install their own officers, they have their own committees, they take up their own offering and handle their own accounting. They decide what missions they will support and plan events such as a Christmas tea and craft bazaar. They are readily mobilized when there is a death in the church or when a member needs a meal or a visit. They honor the women who sacrifice their time and effort to serve the church and are a blessing to the community.

However, there is a generational age gap. Many of the younger women are not getting involved. The older women believe it is a time issue, since so many of the younger woman work and have families to attend. The younger women gather, but not for the same purposes, and there seems to be a disconnect along this generational age segment.

Generational Approach

Because life groups are meant primarily for fellowship, the segmentation means that the church loses a valuable generational integration. It is doubtful that younger couples would appreciate some of the extracurricular activities of their older brothers and sisters. The conversations often revolve around doctor's visits and failing body parts. Likewise, you would be hard pressed to find older couples interested in camping trips or white water rafting with a younger small group. Perhaps there is some value in this segmentation for some discussions and activities, but when it comes to true, Christ-centered fellowship in the Spirit, Bethel is missing a beautiful resource in each other by its generational segmentation.

The older people have the wisdom and experience the younger people need. They know the pitfalls of life and ministry. They know the seasons of family life and the difficulties and challenges that come. Their experience brings a natural wisdom to the table of walking

gracefully through those situations the younger crowd is only beginning to face. On the flip side, the culture is changing so rapidly the older folks are finding it difficult to navigate the new world. Technology alone takes leaps and bounds every two years or so and if the older folks do not have someone, anyone to help them understand the shifting tides, they will be left behind. The natural energy generated by the younger generation is essential for the future of the church. The truth of Scriptures does not change, but the approach to discipleship and reaching the culture with the Gospel should.

Men's and Women's Ministry

In addition to the age segment, there is a style segment when it comes to the Presbyterian Women and the men of the church. The national Presbyterian Women organization was founded in 1988 following the union of Presbyterian denominations in 1983. It was also a union of strong women of both churches, the United Presbyterian Women (UPW) and Women of the Church (WOC). The Presbyterian Women at Bethel meet in "circles," which are groups designed to pray and care for the church. They make food for the sick and provide meals for others who have lost loved ones. They collect dues and give to missions. They have various other craft ministries like sewing, knitting, quilting, stained glass, and wood working, all crafts to either sell to benefit other ministry or to give away to places with little resources. They are a terrific fellowship ministry... for the *older* women at Bethel.

The question often arises around why the next generation of women do not participate. These conversations typically revolve around time. Women today work outside the home more than the women of the previous generation. Even if that statement is false, it is the primary excuse. My observation is about the generational approach. The younger women see it more as a hobby-priority issue. Most of the younger women do not sew or do crafts. They do not knit or quilt. These are the primary activities of the Presbyterian women. The younger women give money to the church, which has an established budget for mission. They do not

understand the need to give further resources to the Presbyterian Women who in turn give to the same missions that are in the church budget. The redundancies are confusing.

What the Presbyterian Women do not know or see, or perhaps what they do not want to acknowledge, is that there are groups of younger women who gather together at Bethel who do not belong to the formal Presbyterian Women organization. There is a women's book club that gathers monthly for fellowship. They do not take dues or create things, but they share their hearts and their encouragement. There is a group of women who meet once a month to pray, mostly for the students and Bethel. They share parenting struggles and joys and pray for all the children and teens at the church as well as their friends. Neither of these groups are officially part of the Presbyterian Women at Bethel. Clearly, they have the time. They have a different generational approach. They have different goals, different priorities, and different schedules. While they may have the time to meet, it isn't in the middle of the morning when many of them are at work.

The men of the church are much more integrated, mostly because they generally only engage themselves in two activities together at the church: breakfast and work. There is currently only one men's Bible study that gathers weekly. There is a monthly men's breakfast on the first Friday, but it is sparsely attended. The call to come to church for a "workday" is heeded by a few strong, willing men, but mostly of the older generation. Previously the men went on retreats to the mountains for some masculine recreation like hiking, fishing, shooting, and camping. Those retreats were always well-received and well-attended. Over the years the attendance on these outings has waned.

The gathering of men is not segmented generationally in the same respect as the Presbyterian Women. It is leadership where the segmentation is found. The younger men at Bethel seem to be stretched so thin, while they might attend a weekend retreat if they can fit it into their schedule, they simply do not have the bandwidth to organize such an endeavor.

Worship Style

Worship style may be the most recognizable generational difference in approach, and on this topic we must tread lightly. This is a broad-brush characterization to say that worship style is generational. There are young families who attend the late, traditional service, and there are eighty-year-olds who are regular worshippers at the 9am contemporary service. Yet, recognizing the exceptions, the traditional choir has no one younger than sixty-five-years-old and the vast majority are over seventy-five. The music is led by the choir, an extremely talented pianist who insists she is not an organist. Without the organ, the country church “feel” is pronounced. When the organist joins, the music takes a swift turn higher and feels much more regal. The congregation sings no matter what. They are strong and on key, and the music is always joyous.

The rest of the liturgy carries a traditionally reformed model. There are multiple call-and-response portions including a Call to Worship, a Call to Corporate Confession, a Prayer of Confession, and an Assurance of Pardon, and a Scripture reading. Most Sundays the congregation affirms the Apostles’ Creed, spoken out loud together, though on communion Sunday, which is the first of the month, the Nicene Creed is used. As a historical note, the congregation voted on December 31, 1961, to incorporate the use of the Apostles’ Creed in its worship services. Two traditional music refrains are employed weekly; the Gloria Patri, which typically follows the Assurance of Pardon, and the Doxology (to the tune of the Old Hundredth) which follows the offering that is accompanied by an anthem sung by the choir. There is a message for children, after which the younger children are dismissed for their own programming, and finally there is a sermon based on a reading of Scripture. The service order varies little, except for special occasions like a baptism, unique prayer moments for missionaries or events, or special guests.

The early service is led by a talented member of Generation Z. The style is typical for modern services with a band complement of guitar(s), bass, keys, and drums, and like many other modern approaches, it lacks an anchor to historic reformed worship. The ages of the band

members are reflective of the attendance, with a couple of retirees and a couple of working Gen X-ers. The congregation is not as involved in the music as they are at the traditional service. This can be attributed to any number of things. It is early. The room is dark. The music is less familiar. The space is in the gym with high ceilings and a wide layout, and the band on the stage with singers out front feels more like a performance, even if the leaders strive to create an environment of participatory worship. Presbyterians, by in large, are much less demonstrative in worship than their Pentecostal and charismatic friends. All these obstacles are relatively new with this generation. Thirty years ago, there was only one style of worship in a Presbyterian church. A family on vacation could visit a church in a faraway city and find a similar, if not exact flow of worship as their home church. Now there is a spectrum that continues to evolve with each passing year. Every church is unique, the songs are unique, the liturgies are unique, and even the credal confessions have taken on more modern language, like changing “Holy Ghost” to “Holy Spirit” and “holy catholic church” to “holy Christian church” in the Apostles’ Creed.

The liturgical format at the modern service begins with two praise songs followed by an extemporaneous prayer and Scripture reading. There’s a message for children, an offering which is another occasion to stand and worship through song, and then the message. It concludes with a praise song and a benediction. Thankfully for Bethel, there is a lively chatter following the services, and since it is early, there is an opportunity to invite people to stay a little longer for coffee, or to take a next step into a study. Most of the time that means the Generation X Mosaic class, or the new young adult class, since the other two classes will already be in session.

Evangelism

Long ago, in many times and in many ways, pastors invited nonbelievers who found their way into worship services to repent and surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, but in these last days, nonbelievers no longer find their way into worship services at all. Granted, there have always been evangelists in the midst of many congregations ready to take the Gospel to the

highways and byways of the city, but if the American church is going to see growth instead of decline, it must approach evangelism from a different angle than previous generation's "y'all come" tactic.

Bethel, like many churches of its size and location, has a massive natural community outreach right on its campus, in its building. The Bethel Preschool educates eighty children every week and sees almost as many families roll through its doors every single day. Many of these families are unchurched. The younger generation is not necessarily looking for a worshipping community. If they do not know Christ, why would they think they need a worshipping community? But they are looking for community. Everyone wants a place to belong. The Cheers theme song resonates here; a place where everybody knows your name and they are always glad you came.

The Bethel Christian Preschool is one evangelistic opportunity, but there are others. In former days the church was the center of social life in a small town. Cornelius is one such small town, but this generation would rather go to a park, a gym, a bar, or a coffee shop for social interaction. No, the church is no longer the social locus, but it could be. People look for convenience. If the church could see its own potential for gathering the community together for social events, it could see a resurgence in community traffic. This does not mean inviting the community to the choir's Christmas concert. I am sure the Christmas concert will be delightful. It does mean considering a concert series of highly talented artists and songwriters that might appeal to folks who would not normally darken the doors of a church building. It might even be an outdoor series. It means opening the space to pickleball pickup games and tournaments, or renovating the space to include a community coffee shop where people who work from their laptops have a quiet space away from home to settle in for some productivity. Not all of these activities will have an explicit Gospel presentation component, but it softens the entry for a generation with no other reason to go. The generational approach to how the property and the ministries of the church can be used for evangelism must be reconsidered.

Décor and Clutter

The Victorian era has found its completion. Can someone please tell the decorating team? Additionally, the seventy's flooring décor is a wrap. When a young family enters a church's space, there should be a sense of hospitality, of home, but not of grandma's home. Not if you want them to stay and make the church their own.

If someone in the younger generation bought a home previously owned by an older generation, there would naturally be a thoughtful cadre of upgrades on paint and carpet; perhaps a wall might be taken down to create more livable space. This is not an attempt to keep up with the Jones' or to play into the pernicious consumeristic Christianity that is plaguing the American church. This is a matter of being good stewards of what is beautiful and adding to the beauty of the space inherited from those who went before. God's house should be lovely, fresh, open, and even inspiring. If this approach is not unusual in a home, why would it be out of the ordinary in a church, especially one seeking to reach the next generation?

There is a type of "nose-blind syndrome" that happens in churches. The space where you have worshipped for thirty years looks exactly the same, except for maybe some new paint every now and again. The same carpet is down. The same tile. The same bathroom vanities and fixtures. The same highchair and bouncy seat you used as an infant is ready for your own children. The storage closets are full of accumulated VHS tapes and VBS "stuff" from the past ten years of ministry. Unused classroom space, or any space for that matter, becomes a catch-all for materials, and signs, and crafts, and anything that was once valuable but will never actually be used again, and slowly that clutter begins to find its way out into the livable spaces. The vestibule table hasn't been dusted in years because the faux flowers that Mildred bought cannot be moved. The hallway is filled with handicap equipment because someone might need it one day. The resources table has quarterly devotions still available from two years ago. It is time for a clean out and an upgrade!

The Church Health Assessment Tool

In June of 2023, Bethel was invited to participate in a survey entitled, Church Health Assessment Tool.⁴ It was an opportunity for the members of Bethel to express their opinions on the health of the church in a multiple-choice survey of one hundred questions. Additionally, the respondents had the opportunity to comment on the state of the church as it relates to ten characteristics of a healthy church. Those ten characteristics are: 1) God's Empowering Presence 2) God-Exalting Worship 3) Spiritual Disciplines 4) Learning and Growing in the Community 5) Loving and Caring Relationships 6) Servant-Leadership Development 7) An Outward Focus 8) Wise Administration and Accountability 9) Networking with the Body of Christ, and 10) Stewardship and Generosity.⁵

Respondents

The respondents were divided into two groups, leadership and congregation. The leadership, which was 15.1% of respondents, was comprised of current elders, deacons, and staff, and the congregation comprising 84.9% was everyone else. 34.5% were male respondents and 65.5% were female. Those respondents who were married comprised 78.2%, widowed, 10.9%, divorced, 8.4%, and single, 2.5%. Over 50% of the respondents indicated they had been at Bethel more than ten years. 16.8% had been there seven to ten years, 16% had been there for four to six years, 5.9% one to three years and 7.6% less than one year.

Over half of those who took the survey were over seventy years old. 26.1% were sixty to sixty-nine, 12.2% were fifty to fifty-nine, 7.6% forty to forty-nine 1.7% under twenty and .8% were between thirty and thirty-nine. Striking here that there were no respondents between twenty and thirty. The overwhelming population, at 97.5% was Caucasian and well over 75% had a college, masters, or doctorate level of education.

⁴ The CHAT survey results can be found in Appendix A.

⁵ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 23.

The two worship services were represented by 56.3% of the 11:00 traditional service and 36.1% from the 9am modern service. 7.6% indicated they attended both services. On the question of Christian education, over two-thirds indicated they attended either Sunday School or Bible study regularly, which is good news for this project.

Another bit of good news was that on the ten characteristics of a healthy church there were only minor variances between the congregation and the leadership, indicating that there is unity and openness between these two groups. The only significant variance was found in the church's view of An Outward Focus, and Networking with the Body of Christ. On a scale of five points, with five being a strength, the leadership indicated that An Outward Focus was just over 3 and the congregation had it at almost 3.5. On Networking, the leadership came in at just over 2.5 while the congregation held at just over 3 on average.

Strengths and Weaknesses

For the congregation, the top three strengths of Bethel were God-Exalting Worship at 68%, God's Empowering Presence at 53% and Stewardship and Generosity, though only 40% indicated that as a strength. With the indication that God's Empowering Presence was a strength, the church affirms that there is an obvious sense of God's presence when you gather for worship, fellowship, and/or service with others. The question with the highest mean score of 4.65 out of 5 from the congregation was: When we gather to worship together, how well do we as a church emphasize biblical and relevant preaching?

The leadership chose two of the same as the congregation with 61% of the leadership team noting that God-Exalting Worship was a top three strength followed by 50% saying Wise Administration and Accountability and 44% indicating a tie between God's Empowering Presence and A Commitment to Loving & Caring Relationships. The question with the highest mean score of 4.76 out of 5 for the leadership was: From your perspective, how well does the church operate with financial integrity and accountability? That the leadership chose Wise

Administration and Accountability, and the congregation did not, indicates that this characteristic needs to be communicated much more clearly than it is currently.

The scores for the weaknesses were much more spread out than the strengths for the congregation, while the leadership was more decided. The congregation was virtually tied on four characteristics being the top three. 50% said both Servant-Leadership Development and An Outward Focus were the top weaknesses. This was a striking result given that Bethel designates more than 10% of its contributions to mission and outreach. It is highly likely that the congregation either does not know this fact, or the mission and outreach of Bethel is not as present and relevant as it needs to be for these disciples. 47% said Learning and Growing in Community was a top weakness while 46% said Networking with the Body of Christ needed the most improvement. This last indication is likely due to the congregation being out of touch with the ways the leadership networks with other churches. Again, this comes down to communication.

Of all one hundred questions, the congregation gave its third lowest response to this question with a mean response of 2.78 out of 5: How well does our church train and equip our members to effectively present the gospel to those outside the Christian faith? The other two lowest questions were: How well does our church serve as a place for supporting the needs of single adults? (With a mean score of 2.46 out of 5) and how often does our church join area-wide celebrations where Christians from other churches worship God together? (With a mean score of 2.52 out of 5).

The leadership was decisive with 61% saying Servant-Leadership Development was the top weakness. 50% said An Outward Focus and 44% tied with Learning and Growing in Community and Networking with the Body of Christ. The good news, again, is that the leadership and congregation are consistent. The leadership's lowest scored questions were the same with the exception of one with a mean score of 2.29 out of 5: How well does our church encourage and equip its members to practice reflection (such as journaling, prayerfully reviewing the day's events, etc.)?

Characteristic Comments

For each of the ten characteristics, respondents were invited to make comments. Dozens of comments for each characteristic were received, but a few notable comments stood out in relation to the current setting of Bethel Presbyterian. Under God's Empowering Presence one wrote, "I feel our church in the past has done a wonderful job at living out and showing God's presence in our church/daily lives. That feeling was somewhat 'put on hold' for the past few years but I think things are moving forward in the right direction." Another wrote, "I'm new to the church and one of the reasons I joined was because of the church encouraging and reminding us to always know God is in charge."

In the area of God-Exalting Worship it was clear from several comments that the segments of generational approach are beginning to break down. One person wrote, "I would encourage more blended services." Someone else had a similar sentiment writing, "We should all be worshipping together based on our size and numbers, however, because of preferences of few, we are separated into two services. This has cut down on fellowship time between Sunday School and worship services. It honestly feels like we are two churches." Another wrote, "The 11 o'clock service is better for getting the message of God through using hymns along with Scripture and sermon." This comment notes the common theological thread in the liturgy and music in the traditional music, which is true most of the time. It is a difficult task, but the attempt is also made at the modern service, though there are fewer liturgical opportunities. Finally, one wrote, "In the early service, very few, sometimes no one, is encouraged to give. If people in this service aren't encouraged to give in a traditional sense (passing a basket) perhaps we could encourage giving in another way- 'use this to give via your phone' or 'scan this QR code' or, 'think about how you will give of your time in the week ahead.'" The hope is that in whatever ways the church is encouraged to give, it is streamlined in all our services and not merely at the modern service.

With Spiritual Disciplines the comments trended toward community studies. The first comment noted, "As a choir member I do not have access to Sunday School." Clearly this is

something that must be addressed. Another wrote, “I think our church can do more in this area. A weeknight program, i.e. Wednesday evening, could be very effective in helping all of us to strengthen in this area.” There were several comments toward this end. “I wish the church would offer some Bible studies or programs that are not during the day- a lot of us work and there are no programs in the evenings.” Still another wrote, “An offering outside of Sunday mornings, such as Wednesday night Ignite program we had in the past would be a great addition.” There is a hunger for more studies together, and apparently a lack of understanding on the nature of spiritual disciplines like prayer, study, fasting, meditation, and solitude. Perhaps a Wednesday class on spiritual disciplines might be two for the price of one.

Learning and Growing in Community echoed the Spiritual Disciplines characteristic with its comments. One person wrote, “Bethel needs a DCE (Director of Christian Education) again.” Another wrote, “Bethel says it wants younger members but does not offer evening Bible studies or events. It’s harder for those of us who work during the day. We need to bring back Wednesday Night Dinner for families to engage youth and working parents.” Still another wrote, “I know everyone says Wednesday night programs are a thing of the past, but I promise you that is where a lot of the strong relationships that exist at the church formed, and children love them. The key is to provide a meal that brings out young parents who don’t want to cook and then provide something for their children, then the adults will attend the programs too.” Finally, one wrote about Learning and Growing Community that, “we need more Life Groups and to encourage small group interaction.” Truly, it is in these less structured moments of fellowship and study that relational connections are cultivated.

With Loving and Caring Relationships, Bethel is mixed. Some said the church excelled and others noted this as an area of improvement. “We need to bring the church together more often.” Another wrote, “I think there are avenues to improve in the areas questioned in this section. Perhaps more life groups for singles.” The final comment noted, “In this area we have varied greatly over the years from the years of conflict to the years of healing.” Some of the

comments dealt with breakdowns in visitation and congregational care. The constructs must be built to identify and manage these care needs.

Servant-Leadership Development is an area of weakness at Bethel that is taken to heart. One person astutely defined the generational association segment writing, “There is a coterie of members of long standing which tend to cycle through the most important leadership positions. Sometimes, the persons on the nominating committees return to those who have served in the past simply because they don’t really know the newer people.” Another wrote, almost as a refutation, “Please talk to the nominating committee to learn how difficult it is to find leaders.” One scathing comment noted, “I see no effort in this area on the part of Bethel at all.” Ouch! Another noted the generational approach and the generational age segments writing, “I feel there is a huge division with the two services. Being involved with the women’s group, there is seldom interaction with females younger than 60.” A final, but thematic comment read, “Bethel has a good bench of servant-leaders willing and able to do whatever is needed. Unfortunately, that bench is the same people across the board and Bethel has far more Sunday morning consumers than servant leaders.”

With Outward Focus it was identified that more communication is necessary. Nevertheless, many people had plenty to say on this characteristic. “I think our congregation gets really excited about projects like Haiti but does not seem to put the same type of enthusiasm in local ways where there is a lot of need both in our community...” Another wrote, “I feel some members are aware of our global outreach and mission work, but it is not communicated or encouraged to the general congregation.” Still another wrote, “Bethel is an inward focused church. Bethel serves its youth well and its leaders ensure that Bethel sends appropriate funds to the mission field. The majority of the congregation does not seem mission focused at this time.” I do not agree with that last assessment, though a clear vision for the ways Bethel could serve and bless its community and world is needed.

Wise Administration and Accountability was a strength according to Bethel’s leadership in this survey, but you would not know it with some of the comments. “We spent

over \$68,000 for consultants with little or no results, process, application, and communication of vision changes to the congregation. There is a lack of transparency from the leadership to the congregation and a lack of accountability.” Granted, many of the current leadership were not serving when those consultants were hired, but the point is well taken. Another noted, “There has been a wall between the Session and the congregation that I see coming down.” This is good news and I hope it will continue.

In Networking with the Body of Christ it was noted earlier that much of the networking that happens is at the leadership level. “Bethel has historically been involved with the community Thanksgiving service.” Another wrote, “I love the community Thanksgiving service and try to never miss it.” Still another noted, “The community Thanksgiving service comes to mind but not sure if that still happens post covid.” Again, like many of the other characteristics, communication is key. The Thanksgiving service took place last year and Bethel was a key part of its success. Alas, one final comment bursts the balloon writing, “Bethel does not meet with other churches other than the occasional Thanksgiving service or Presbytery event.” It is time for some collaboration.

The final characteristic in the survey was Stewardship and Generosity and it solicited the least number of comments of them all. One noted, “We need a more comprehensive stewardship campaign annually.” That may be true, but when the budget is good and people are giving, there is little communication, teaching, or encouragement for people in the area of giving. Yet one comment cut to a different issue on the rise, writing, “If a special need is presented Bethel always rises to the occasion, and it has deep pockets, but I’m not sure how well we are teaching the next generation.” That last comment could not be more prophetic of the need to teach, not only about good stewardship and finances, but about following Jesus.

Conclusion

Bethel is already an amazing group of believers with a deep, rich, historical legacy of faith and service to its community, but the world is changing. While the gospel message remains

the same, the segments that divide the congregation must be identified to bring the unity of the mission of Bethel into sharper focus. Strengths must be solidified, and areas of weakness must be accessed for greater understanding about whether they are essential to the overall health and mission of the church.

The setting of Bethel with its recent turmoil and cycle of pastors places it in a unique position of opportunity. The people are hungry for vision and relevance. They are eager for healthy, well-paced change. They earnestly desire to grow in their faith, to have deeper fellowship with one another, and to reach the ever-changing community in ways that declare the goodness and salvation of God. In short, Bethel is ready for a new season of intentional, focused discipleship.

Discipleship begins with developing leaders who will be willing and able to develop others. Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck in their leadership development book, *Designed to Lead* write, “For leaders to be developed consistently and intentionally, churches must possess conviction, culture, and constructs.”⁶ At Bethel, the “convictions” are easily identified and solidly biblical. The Lordship of Jesus Christ, the authority of Scripture, the church as a family, leadership development, and evangelism can all be included as convictions of this body. The “culture” is evolving to embody those areas of discipleship: worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach. The systems and processes, what Eric Geiger calls “constructs,” continue to bring the mission to greater life in the church and in its outreach. The worship services, bible studies and Sunday School, fellowship ministries, volunteer opportunities, and outreach initiatives all serve as platforms for developing disciples. It is to that mission of process of intentional discipleship that this paper and this project will focus while seeking to unite a segmented church family.

⁶ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Company, 2016), 14.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Discipleship is the Mission of the Church

In his earthly ministry, Jesus said some things which, on the surface, seem to be quite curious. For instance, after his resurrection, as Jesus was preparing his disciples for his ascension, he told them that he would be with them until the very end of the age. And then he left. “Behold, I am with you always, and goodbye,” (that is not a direct quote). Of course, we know that Pentecost and the sending the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, is now the presence of Christ in and among his people, but at the time the disciples must have wondered what it all meant. Why was Jesus leaving? What would happen next? One thing that was clear, however, was the mandate, the commission. Make disciples. Baptize them. Teach them everything I commanded you. Proclaim the kingdom of God. On this Jesus was unequivocal in the Gospel of Matthew¹:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²

A disciple is a student, or follower; one who is instructed. One question that often arises in Christian circles on this question of making disciples is whether Jesus was inferring that Christians make their own disciples, or that Christians make disciples of Jesus. This is a nuanced, but critical question, and there’s a fine line separating the two approaches. When gathering with a disciple or a group of disciples, the disciple-maker must be committed to the teaching of Jesus. Making disciples does not mean taking people under the wing to make sure they are

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

² Matthew 28:16-20.

proprietary to a certain disciple-maker and off limits to others. The Apostle Paul spoke to this kind of division in 1 Corinthians, writing,

My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name.³

In this way, making disciples must not center around the disciple-maker, but around the Lord. It is the teaching of Jesus, the ways of Jesus, and the purposes of Jesus to which the minds and the hearts of disciples are to be turned.

Yet, on the other hand, in this same letter the Apostle notes that the disciple-maker does bear a certain responsibility of behavior and teaching which disciples should seek to emulate. He writes at the end of chapter ten moving into chapter eleven, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."⁴ Commentators Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner note in their work on 1 Corinthians that "Paul's call to the imitation of his example as he follows that of Christ is not about the reinforcement of his own power and imposing an ideology of 'sameness.'"⁵ Granted, Paul was encouraging the Corinthian believers in how to act toward outsiders, but he set a standard of disciple-making by placing himself as the one in flesh and blood. Paul set himself as the standard to whom they would look and from whom they would learn how to follow Jesus.

³ 1 Corinthians 1:11-15.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1.

⁵ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 499.

In this way, the answer to the nuanced question of whether disciples are to look to Jesus or to their spiritual mentors in the faith is, yes. Yes, making disciples means teaching people to follow Jesus, and yes, making disciples means reproducing people who exhibit the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their lives as the disciple-maker has taught them through their lifestyle. This means that the commission for disciples of Jesus to make disciples of Jesus involves both an accountable commitment to relationship with the Lord on the part of the disciple-maker and developing these accountable relationships among the disciples being made. The church is a community, and discipleship takes place in community.

Jesus warned the Pharisees in Matthew twenty-three about the fruit of poor discipleship cultivated from rotten community theology, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are.”⁶ The Pharisees who interacted with Jesus were mostly concerned with the preservation of tradition and power at all costs and less about seeking and loving God with all their hearts and souls. This is a cautionary tale for churches to be sure. The reality of replication creates a tremendous responsibility on the part of the disciple-maker, which is precisely why it is imperative that making disciples happens in the context of community, in the context and accountability of the church committed to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Many Christians relegate the Great Commission of Matthew twenty-eight to evangelism. Certainly, one cannot make a disciple out of an unbeliever. Evangelism is essential for the mission of the church to be accomplished, but evangelism is not the end of the mission, it is the beginning of the journey of discipleship. New believers must be trained just as Jesus trained his own disciples. I have identified five key biblical areas of development in every healthy disciple of Christ which the church should seek to develop in its own culture. These five

⁶ Matthew 23:15.

areas are: Worship, Study, Fellowship, Service, and Outreach. We find examples of these five areas in the community Jesus cultivated with his twelve disciples as well as many other places in the Scriptures.

Making Disciples through Worship

Within the first century Jewish culture there was a habitual practice of worship. It was written into their daily, weekly, and seasonal rhythms through prayers, holidays, greetings, and practices. Granted, there were many times when the people of God failed to live into their God-given rhythms of worship of Adonai, often turning to other gods instead, yet we also read of the many times when they did. In the book of Ruth, we see a greeting between Boaz and the harvesters who worked in his field. “Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, “The Lord be with you!” “The Lord bless you!” they answered.⁷ It is a simple greeting and answer, but you miss it if you do not pay attention. This was liturgical. It is similar to the greeting many churches give to each other in worship. “The Lord be with you,” “and also with you.” Greetings of “peace,” or “shalom” among the Jewish people were also common in Biblical times as well as today.

The worship of Jesus was new in the Gospels and was introduced by Gentiles. It was the Magi from the East who first worshipped the newborn king. “On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him.”⁸ Commentator Leon Morris elaborates on their worship writing, “The Magi prostrated themselves before the baby in lowly worship. They proceeded to open their treasure chests and offer gifts (the verb is used of offering in general, but is especially frequent for sacrifices).”⁹ This example of worship

⁷ Ruth 2:4.

⁸ Matthew 2:10-11.

⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 41.

was not a direct teaching of Jesus to his disciples, but its use made it clear that the worship of Jesus as the King of the Jews was appropriate, and not to be limited to Jews alone.

Miracles were a normal occurrence when Jesus was around. He healed the sick, restored the broken and lame, gave sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf. On two occasions he raised the widow's son as well as Lazarus from the dead. Clearly Jesus was a man of extraordinary power to perform miracles for people, but on at least three occasions there was circumstantial evidence that Jesus was more than a man and worthy of worship.

First, at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan river by John, as he came up out of the water there was a sign that made it clear that Jesus was exceptional. "Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."¹⁰ The sign of the dove and the voice which accompanied it were objective signs performed, not by Jesus himself, but by the Spirit revealing the truth of Jesus' identity as the Son of God. James Edwards, a commentator on Luke's gospel account reminds his readers of the historic nature of this event, writing, "Second Temple Judaism commonly believed that with the cessation of the great OT prophets, the Holy Spirit had ceased speaking directly to God's people. The opening of heaven at the baptism inaugurates the long-awaited return of God's Spirit, not in a prophet but in God's very own Son."¹¹

The second occasion was when Jesus calmed the storm and the sea. This story is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels. Mark records it this way,

And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' And

¹⁰ Luke 3:21-22.

¹¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 117.

he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'¹²

Jesus was extraordinary in everything that he did, but on this occasion, he showed that his power was not limited to the ails of the human body. Jesus could command the elements of nature and they would obey him. Great fear seized the hearts of the disciples because they knew that the man in their boat, meek and gentle as he was, possessed a power they could not begin to comprehend. Jesus showed himself as one worthy of their fear and their worship.

The third occasion was Jesus' transfiguration. Likewise, this story is recorded in the three Synoptics. Jesus chooses Peter, James, and John to join him on what tradition holds is Mt. Hermon, the tallest mountain in the north of Galilee. Jesus seemed to only invite his disciples with him so that they could be witnesses to the supernatural event that would occur.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!' When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. But Jesus came and touched them. 'Get up,' he said. 'Don't be afraid.' When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.¹³

Falling facedown terrified is a natural reaction of being in the presence of God. It happened to Abraham when God met him and promised him an heir in his old age. It happened to Joshua as he met the Lord before entering the Promised Land. It happened to John at the beginning of the Revelation. And it happened at the transfiguration as the disciples understood they were in the presence of God incarnate. John understood this truth and articulated it in the first chapter of his account writing, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of

¹² Mark 4:36-41.

¹³ Matthew 17:1-8.

grace and truth.”¹⁴ Jesus was teaching them about their approach in worship. After the resurrection, as Jesus prepared his ascension, the disciples met him and worshipped him. Luke records it this way, “While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Then they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.”¹⁵ The New Testament writers were clear that the disciples engaged in the worship of Jesus and that this engagement was appropriate and acceptable.

The Apostle Paul articulated the nature of Christian worship in chapter twelve in his letter to the Romans writing, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.”¹⁶ In the Old Testament, worship involved animal sacrifice at the tabernacle and later the temple. It was brought by families and administered by priests. In these last days worship is a matter of the heart. It is brought by individuals and communities through the offer of lives to God for His service. The church joins together to lift up holy hands in prayer, filled with the Holy Spirit, “speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁷

Worship for an individual requires repentance and faith through the grace of God, but worship as a key area of discipleship happens in community. The service of worship is the most public and accessible part of a church’s ministry and is often the entry point for the community into the life of a church. Theologically speaking, it elevates the resurrection of Jesus Christ on a weekly basis. David Currie brilliantly highlights this theological elevation in his book, *The Big*

¹⁴ John 1:14.

¹⁵ Luke 24:51–53.

¹⁶ Romans 12:1.

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:19–20.

Idea of Biblical Worship writing, “Perhaps the greatest implicit testimony to the centrality of the resurrection for Christian worship was the shift of the primary day for corporate worship from the Sabbath- Saturday, the seventh day of the week- to Sunday- the first day of the week- because that was the day of resurrection.”¹⁸ Worship as discipleship for a church requires a prayerful, thoughtful platform that ushers God’s people in a real and spiritual way into the presence of God and teaches God’s people the ways we are to approach God by faith in the resurrected Jesus Christ.

Making Disciples through Study

Many churches who have a study ministry, or Christian education ministry, call it their “discipleship” ministry, as if discipleship could be boiled down simply to study. Yet study is an essential piece of the life of a disciple of Christ. Jesus often taught his disciples the Scriptures in the context of refuting the leading teachers and scribes of his day. In Matthew 22 we read,

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him.’²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?’ Jesus replied, ‘You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.’ When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.¹⁹

Setting aside the issues Jesus was addressing, clearly, Jesus was concerned with setting the record straight on both the importance of the Scripture and its accurate interpretation. Morris declares that “it is one thing to be able to quote passages that one thinks support one’s preconceived position and quite another to understand and follow the teaching of Scripture.

¹⁸ David A. Currie, *The Big Idea of Biblical Worship: The Development & Leadership of Expository Services* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC., 2017), 14.

¹⁹ Matthew 22:23-33.

And just as they do not really understand the Scripture, so they do not know the power of God.”²⁰

It was the desire of Jesus for his disciples to not only know the Scripture, but to know the power of God and to rightly handle the truth. The Apostle Paul noted this same important approach, writing to Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”²¹ The verb used in this exhortation, “Do your best,” is used several times in Paul’s writing and according to NT commentator Robert W. Yarbrough indicates that “Timothy needs to make Paul’s instructions his highest priority. We might also translate ‘spare no effort’ or ‘tackle this no matter what.’”²² To know the Scriptures and to rightly handle the Scriptures both require a level of study that is beyond a passive, cursory method. Paul’s encouragement to Timothy can be read as an imperative to every pastor and in turn to every disciple who desires to live a life given to Christ. The mastery of biblical thought and language is an essential component in the flourishing disciple.

Even more, disciples must be taught to obey the Scriptures as James writes, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”²³ This exhortation comes on the heels of James’ encouragement to accept the word that has been implanted in you. Douglas Moo notes in his commentary on this verse that, “James’ imagery of the ‘implanted’ word might suggest that careful scrutiny of God’s word is no longer needed. But, against its OT background, this concept of the word ‘written on the heart’ does not mean we possess

²⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 560.

²¹ 2 Timothy 2:15.

²² Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 385.

²³ James 1:22.

automatic knowledge of God's will."²⁴ Disciples must be engaged in a ministry of study where the church intentionally teaches Scriptures and the path to obedience in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Paul and Silas went to Berea they followed their usual pattern, entered the synagogue, and preached Jesus Christ to the Jews. "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true. As a result, many of them believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men."²⁵ The Bereans are described as being "more noble." Commentator David Patterson notes that the term here for noble, "referred originally to noble birth, but came to be applied more generally to high-minded behavior."²⁶ They took it upon themselves to consider Paul's claims and to weigh them against God's word, likely in the Law and Prophets. The power of study in the city of Berea not only saw new believers from the Jews, but even Gentiles were also included in the awakening of the Spirit.

It's the same approach Jesus took with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus after his resurrection. "He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself."²⁷ Jesus did not pull out an Old Testament scroll from his bag to read. In the Jewish culture the Scriptures were memorized. The well-crafted use of the

²⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 89.

²⁵ Acts 17:11-12.

²⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 484.

²⁷ Luke 24:25-27.

Scriptures in dialogue was akin to a sword fight. Jesus merely reminded these two disciples of the power of their sword and the word of their testimony.

Disciples must be taught to study the Scriptures. One obstacle to this over the years and even present today is literacy. Christians throughout history have come to faith through the hearing of the word and memorization and not necessarily through self-study of the Scripture texts. Knowledge of the word will not simply appear in the lives of disciples; they must be taught the word of God from the Scriptures. The Apostle Peter notes that while the knowledge of the word may not automatically spring into existence, its power is at work in the believer who listens and obeys, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”²⁸ The testimony and the gospel of Jesus Christ has the power to save for those who believe. How much more does the word of God have the power to sanctify for those who study and grow in discipleship?

Effective discipleship happens in the community through the ministry of the church. While the first key platform in discipleship in modern churches is often the worship service, the next step is study. Believers who earnestly desire to follow Jesus will develop a hunger for the truth in the word of God. It is the responsibility of the church to provide the platform for those disciples to be fed and to be filled with the knowledge of God.

Making Disciples through Fellowship

Fellowship may not seem on the surface to be a substantive component of a healthy, flourishing disciple, but we see in the Scriptures the value and necessity of godly fellowship in the life of the disciple. Jesus not only welcomed the worship of his disciples and taught them the Scriptures, but Jesus also valued time together around the table.

²⁸ 1 Peter 1:22-23.

In Matthew chapter 9 we find the calling of Matthew, the tax collector. As if it were not bad enough to invite a person of the most despised trade and association into the discipleship process, Jesus then finds himself at Matthew's home in fellowship around the table.

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."²⁹

So often we read the Scriptures for what we can glean from Jesus' verbal teaching and miss what we can learn from Jesus' social cues. Jesus, along with the rest of this culture, saw meals as holy gatherings and meant to be set apart for God. To the Pharisees, Jesus was breaking protocol by including sinners. Of course, they never confronted Jesus, and even their question was more of an accusation than a question. Nevertheless, Jesus responds that fellowship is an open door for God to change lives. Leon Morris, in his commentary on Matthew notes that, "to eat with them meant to refrain from condemning them; it gave countenance to their laxity. The Pharisees could not understand it. They saw Jesus as a religious teacher, and they could not understand how a religious man could associate with irreligious people."³⁰

A similar episode occurs on the road to Jericho. Jesus was riding through town when another "sinner," the tax collector named Zacchaeus wanted a better vantage point. Luke's account tells us, "When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly."³¹ Jesus defied the religious cultural conventions by going to fellowship at the home of this tax collector. Edwards notes the condition of tax collectors writing, "Classed with murderers and robbers, tax collectors were hated in the Jewish world, as are informants in

²⁹ Matthew 9:9-13.

³⁰ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 221.

³¹ Luke 19:5.

totalitarian societies today.”³² Jesus not only loved this despised man, he had the nerve to bring salvation to his home. “Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”³³ Jesus used common, everyday fellowship around the table as a means for discipleship, in this case, the initial stage of evangelism. Yet even in the display, Jesus is teaching the importance of fellowship for spiritual growth. Disciples can either observe fellowship as opportunity to grow in grace and hospitality as Jesus teaches, or as an opportunity to isolate and form judgmental cliques as the Pharisees taught.

Fellowship is meant to bring people together in unity and was one of the defining characteristics of the early church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.³⁴

Among these characteristics were devotion to study through the teaching of the Apostles, worship in prayer, outreach in seeing their numbers increase, and fellowship where they grew as a loving family, children of their heavenly father.

When the Apostle Paul began making his rounds in the early church there was quite a bit of unease among the leaders who had once walked with Jesus, since Paul had not. But in Jerusalem Paul reported that, “James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we

³² Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 529.

³³ Luke 19:9-10.

³⁴ Acts 2:42 & 46-47.

should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.”³⁵ The fellowship they experienced was a kind of “welcoming” into the inner circle.

This is the kind of fellowship needed for a church to effectively make disciples. It is too easy for established churches to go through the motions of worship services, classes, and programs, without making intentional efforts to provide on-ramps for people who need to take a step into a more intimate circle of fellowship. The Apostle John wrote in his first epistle, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.”³⁶ The fellowship ministry of the church is about providing open doors to Christ and open doors to community.

Jesus shared some of his most powerful teaching around the table of fellowship, including the last supper with his disciples while celebrating the Passover meal. There, Jesus gave a new command to these Jewish disciples who had celebrated the Passover every year their entire lives remembering their slavery and deliverance from Egypt. Now when they ate the bread and drank the cup, they were to remember Jesus as the source of their spiritual deliverance from slavery to sin and death. After his resurrection, Jesus harkened back to this moment at a different table of fellowship. He was walking along the road to Emmaus unrecognized but teaching two disciples how to study the Scriptures. “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.”³⁷ In this, we see that fellowship around the table, fellowship as a means to welcome, an on-ramp to deeper friendship, is a critical component of discipleship and should be practiced with intentionality in the church.

³⁵ Galatians 2:9-10.

³⁶ 1 John 1:3.

³⁷ Luke 24:30-31.

Making Disciples through Service

We learn from the gospel according to Matthew that, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”³⁸ Discipleship means becoming like the disciple maker. He makes this point in John’s account saying, “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”³⁹ Jesus was not merely speaking of himself in this sentence, he was laying down a model of service to be followed. Everything the Lord Jesus did for mankind was out of a motivation of love and redemption, but everything he did was an act of service. His very existence, his incarnation was for the purpose of serving mankind, and his disciples are called to follow his example.

One of the very first formal appointments to service within the New Testament church happens in Acts chapter six as the church began to grow beyond the ability of the apostles to serve:

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.”⁴⁰

These positions in the early church were leadership positions to be sure, but they were also positions of service. They were tasked with making sure the food was distributed equally among the Hebraic and Hellenistic widows. It was as if the twelve were making disciples through appointing them to tasks of service. If the teachers spent their time distributing bread, they would not have the time to serve the church through their careful study of the Scriptures. Peterson notes, “Gospel preaching may have been the apostolic priority but this in no way

³⁸ Matthew 20:28.

³⁹ John 13:14-15.

⁴⁰ Acts 6:1-4.

lessened the importance of good leadership in the care of widows. The role of apostles in the process was to turn responsibility over to them.”⁴¹ Each discipleship responsibility was an act of service essential to the building of a healthy, unified church, the body of Christ.

The Apostle Paul uses this analogy in several of his letters noting that the body of Christ is made up of all the members. “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”⁴² Paul uses the analogy to promote unity within the body through recognizing that the health of one part is the health of the whole. The Apostle saw the importance of serving one another in need within the body as a way not only of healing the wounded, but of demonstrating and operating out of the gifting of the Holy Spirit. It was this operation in the gifts of the Spirit that served as the focus of Paul’s discipleship in his letters to the Corinthians, the Romans, and the Ephesians.

In his letter to the Romans Paul wrote,

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.⁴³

In the church there is to be no such thing as lowly service or a less important part of the body. All service is a high calling, and all members have purpose and import. The primary encouragement here is for disciples to serve according to the grace and the faith they have received. “We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.”⁴⁴ In order to grow in grace and faith disciples are encouraged to operate in the gifts of the Spirit designed to serve one another and the world. The Romans are therefore making disciples through service to one

⁴¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 233.

⁴² 1 Corinthians 12:12.

⁴³ Romans 12:3-5.

⁴⁴ Romans 12:6.

another through their various gifts and God's Spirit is poured out on his disciples who serve each other in a multitude of ways that benefit the church mutually.

In Ephesians he moved beyond service through the gifts of the Spirit to the offices of the church appointed by the Lord for the express purpose of discipleship. Paul wrote, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."⁴⁵ The five-fold ministry of the church here is meant explicitly to equip disciples for works of service all for the overall health of the body of Christ. Peter O'Brien, teacher and commentator on Paul's letter to the Ephesians notes that "ministers have been given by Christ to equip believers for the exercise of their gifts in Christian service, so that by means of both the ministers and the common service of believers the body of Christ may be built."⁴⁶ In other words, effective discipleship involves the intentional act of service both on the part of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers, as well as on the part of the people these ministers are discipling.

At the end of the matter of making disciples through service in the context of gifts and offices within the body of Christ is the continued motivation toward love. As Paul wrapped up his chapter on the gifts within the church at Corinth, he noted that everyone is different. "Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way."⁴⁷ Paul then moves into the next portion of his letter encouraging the body of Christ to love one another. Above all the noise of tongues and

⁴⁵ Ephesians 4:11-13.

⁴⁶ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 301-302.

⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:29-31.

prophecy, teaching and miracles, love must remain the central and greatest treasure to which the body must seek. Love binds it all together and acts as the same motivator for all the service of God for the church and all the service of the church to each other.

Making Disciples through Outreach

Jesus led by example of service before he sent his disciples to do the same. In Matthew chapter eight, Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum and found Peter's mother-in-law unwell. "When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick."⁴⁸ Jesus served Peter's family through healing and served the community through exorcism, the precise acts of service he later sends his disciples out to perform in Luke chapter nine. "When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."⁴⁹ Edwards surmises that the two distinguishing marks of church outreach in every age have been Gospel Proclamation and Mercy Ministry.⁵⁰ They go hand in hand. Jesus showed them how to do it, and then sent them out to do it. In this way, Jesus was not only sending his disciples out to make more disciples, Jesus was making disciples by sending them out. Parsing the difference here is crucial in this study. A disciple is called to make more disciples, but a disciple is never fully formed. Every disciple is becoming, and outreach is a key component of healthy discipleship.

Luke chapter ten gives a similar commission not to the twelve, but to seventy-two disciples to go out and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

⁴⁸ Matthew 8:14-16.

⁴⁹ Luke 9:1-2.

⁵⁰ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 263.

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.”⁵¹

Jesus was clear that the disciples had a responsibility of proclamation, but not a responsibility of harvest, that belonged to the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, the command was to go out to towns where they may or may not be welcomed.

Outreach is the ministry of the church beyond its own walls and property. Outreach involves evangelism but can involve so much more. Every disciple of Jesus is called to be a witness of the grace of God in their lives. The church gathers and the church is scattered, this is the rhythm of the church during the week. While every disciple may have opportunities to share their faith with neighbors, coworkers, unbelieving family and friends, there should also exist an intentional form of outreach originating within the body of Christ.

The Great Commission in Matthew twenty-eight is Jesus’ clearest command to the church to make disciples, but it is the tip of the iceberg of discipleship. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”⁵² Evangelize them. Baptize them. Teach them what Jesus commanded which included outreach, the very catalyst for their discipleship mission.

The Scriptures give us many examples of effective outreach on the part of the church. Paul’s first missionary journey originated in the city of Antioch where disciples were first called Christians. “Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me

⁵¹ Luke 10:8-12.

⁵² Matthew 28:16-20.

Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”⁵³ The church in Antioch understood that the message must go out, the commission to reach and baptize all nations meant proactive, intentional outreach. This was an opportunity for the church to support, to pray, to commission those members of the body who were uniquely equipped for overseas missions, and it undoubtedly caused them to grow in their faith.

In Paul’s second letter to Corinth, he encourages them to send financial gifts to the church in Jerusalem who he sets up as the source of their spiritual wealth. He tells them, “And here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.”⁵⁴ This was a comprehensive outreach project involving multiple churches in multiple cities meant to build up the body of Christ in Jerusalem, and Paul used it as an opportunity to increase the faith of the givers. In other words, this financial offering was an opportunity for discipleship through outreach. The Corinthians, as well as the Philippians, were learning the grace of outreach- generosity, and growing in their faith as a result.

Outreach is clearly a command of Jesus and an essential task of the church. The benefit is not only for those for whom the outreach is intended, but for those involved. Discipleship is a lifelong process of becoming like Jesus Christ, and every step out of the church, especially in intentional ways in gospel proclamation and mercy ministries, is an opportunity to grow as a disciple of Christ.

⁵³ Acts 13:1-3.

⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 8:10-11.

Conclusion

Discipleship formation is a process of growth which happens in and through the church through ministries of worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach. A disciple of Jesus Christ is invited into a community of believers and into a life-long journey of transformation into the likeness of Jesus. The Apostle Paul mentioned this very goal in his letter to the believers in Corinth where he wrote, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”⁵⁵ The “unveiling” Paul mentions here is about the Jewish believers seeing the Law as an indicator of the glory of God that would come in the Savior Jesus Christ.

Every disciple needs an unveiling moment when they see not only the Scriptures, but the entire creation in a new light. The good news of the Kingdom of God has come in Jesus Christ, and it transforms the way people see the world. Sin and brokenness do not disappear, and evil still makes itself known, but disciples of Christ come to know a victory over all the brokenness of sin. That unveiling, or new birth is only the beginning of the journey of discipleship. Thereafter, a whole new paradigm is seized through which the disciple now grows.

This is not a passive endeavor. The church must be intentional about the process of discipleship for its people, and identifying the five key biblical areas of development in the healthy disciple of Christ which the church should seek to develop in its own culture is critical. Yet, it takes more than identification of these areas, they must be cultivated for growth in every individual. This is the mandate given to the church through the body of the Scriptures. It was evident in Jesus’ ministry, in the letters of the Apostles, and even in the stories of the Old Testament. May it become more and more evident within the walls of the church.

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Mission of Bethel According to Leading Scholars

There are moments when one might look around and wonder if the institutional church has somehow lost its way. The fractures, divisions, and the diversity of emphasis in mission reveal an institution that appears to have been designed by ambitious religious enthusiasts rather than by Jesus. In some churches evangelism happens more by accident than by intention and discipleship is relegated to self-help classes on parenting and personal finance. Depending on what personal “needs” an individual is hoping to meet will determine the church that person will decide to attend. In spite all of this, God continues to use the church to accomplish his mission in the world.

No church is perfect, and there is a balance between the capacity to adequately disciple people and the desire for growth. Some churches have found that balance while others are still searching. Alister McGrath, in his book *Christian Spirituality*, notes, “One of the most noticeable features of Christian history is that groups and individuals who share a common theological foundation chose to place their emphasis on different aspects of that theology.”¹ For the twenty-first century protestant evangelical church, that aspect may be evangelism and church growth, or Pentecostalism, reformed theology and tradition, or an emphasis on good music and self-help preaching. History continues to bear out McGrath’s view that individual churches have varied practical and theological points of divergence.

Imperfect but justified, fractured but being made whole, incomplete but undergoing transformation; these are the characteristics of the Bride of Christ. This is the identity of the modern church, but what is God’s purpose for these wandering sojourners who congregate in local, steeped buildings of brick and mortar? What is God’s mission for the local church?

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 10.

Whether it is evangelism or discipleship, church planting or church growth, meeting existential or spiritual needs, the local church has a defined mission to complete and a purpose to fulfill. In their book, *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth*, Thom Rainer and Chuck Lawless write, “The church is often the most confused about its purpose and particular vision for carrying out that purpose. Very few members, including church staff, could articulate how these purposes will be specifically accomplished by the church in its local context.”² The lack of ability of church members to articulate their unique mission is problematic, but solvable with intention.

The church cannot move forward in a united way while viewing these differences in emphases as polarizing and contradictory. The church must not ask the question, “should we emphasize evangelism *or* discipleship, church planting *or* church growth, the imperative to meet existential *or* spiritual needs?” These “either/or” topics must be married together and understood as complementary in the way they advance the Gospel of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ in the world. But we are not there yet.

It’s helpful to have a metaphor in mind when creating a vision or a statement of mission. A garden is a favorite metaphor because it is seasonal and requires diligence and hard work on the part of the farmer yet relies on the rain and the sun, the ground and the soil for growth. It is an appropriate metaphor for discipleship as the church seeks to establish and grow in its message and mission. How does your garden grow?

Planting or Cultivating

There is no argument that evangelism is not an essential task of the church. No Christian author would dare suggest that evangelism is outdated or should somehow cease to be practiced. While most church leaders agree with its importance, they differ in its execution. Some hold that evangelism should be the primary focus of the local church, gearing all

² Thom S. Rainer & Chuck Lawless, *Eating the Elephant: Leading the Established Church to Growth* (Bemidji, MN: Pinnacle Publishers, 2003) 15.

ministries toward reaching skeptics and unbelievers. This would be like planting a garden and leaving it to plant other gardens without any cultivation. Others see evangelism as the first step into a lifelong process of discipleship which involves much more than seeing people walk past the threshold of believing faith. Repeatedly, Mark Mittelberg makes the case that winning souls for Christ is the overarching function of the church. Mittelberg writes, “We were made to fulfill the Great Commission. I believe evangelizing is the primary reason God left us here on the planet.”³ But does Mittelberg, and others who emphasize winning souls, misread the Great Commission by focusing only on the front-end evangelism to the exclusion of life-long discipleship? Is it either planting or cultivating; either evangelism or discipleship?

Either Evangelism

The commission is to make disciples of all nations beginning with proclaiming the Gospel to those who have never heard, praying, and seeing people come to faith in Jesus Christ by the power and initiative of the Holy Spirit. Elliot Clark argues that proclaiming the Gospel, rather than sharing the Gospel is an important distinction. “If by “sharing” we imply a kind of charity where we only give the gospel to willing recipients, then our Christian vernacular has become a problem. Especially since the Bible rarely uses such language to describe the act of evangelism.”⁴ Evangelism should be intentional and not an activity into which one passively stumbles. To share rather than to proclaim, Clark compares to a baseball pitching coach;

It would be no different from a baseball coach who consistently described the role of pitchers in terms of tossing the ball. In practice or a game, whenever his pitchers were struggling to get batters out, what if his dominant instructions was simply to toss the ball? Not throw strikes. Not work the corners. Not change speeds. Not pound it inside. Just toss the ball. Would the pitchers have an accurate understanding of their responsibility?⁵

³ Mark Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) 21.

⁴ Elliot Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles: Life on Mission as Strangers in Our Own Land* (Denmark: The Gospel Coalition, 2019), 94.

⁵ Clark, 95-96.

Clark is not alone in his assessment that evangelism must be defined and intentional. The message can be difficult, especially when dealing with matters of life and death. Mittelberg writes, “Like it or not, we have an unpopular message, and we have been commissioned to present it boldly. But while it may be unpopular, it certainly is good news to people who are lost and headed for a Christ-less eternity.”⁶ The evangelistic message is unpopular because it flies against a culture’s notion that a person rises or falls on their own merit. People want to choose their own priorities, which itself is a product of the fall; my life is about me, my decisions, my desires. The prevailing sentiment is that if one can exist while pursuing and satisfying their base desires while keeping a semblance of a moral compass as defined by their culture, in the end they will live happily ever after. This overly optimistic philosophy neglects to account for inevitable tragedy, loss, failure, depression, diagnoses, or death. People need Jesus.

Robert Coleman reminds his soul-winning readers, “Evangelism begins by following Jesus. The road is different for each disciple, but the direction is the same.”⁷ Setting out to lead someone to faith in Jesus Christ by proclaiming the gospel is an essential first step of evangelism. The gospel of salvation is the heart-transforming message. Jesus, in his incarnation, brought the kingdom of God to space and time. Jesus, in his death and resurrection, was the key to the door of experiencing the transforming power of God’s kingdom in the individual heart. Tim Keller affirms invitations to believe the gospel but is careful to note that the explanation of the gospel should be appropriately articulated. He writes in his book, *Center Church*;

We must call people to personal conversion. However, the typical evangelical presentation is too shallow. It speaks cursorily about a God whom we have sinned against, a Savior who died for our sins, and a call to believe in that Savior. The simplicity of this communication presumes that those listening share the same essential understanding of the words *God* and *sin* as the speaker.⁸

⁶ Mittelberg, 39.

⁷ Robert Coleman, *The Master’s Way of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 27.

⁸ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 264.

In this statement Keller discounts the work of the Holy Spirit between the speaker and the hearer, for it is not the clear articulation that saves, but the inner work of the Holy Spirit through conviction and regeneration which brings an individual to repentance. Nevertheless, Keller's point is well-taken, that when we preach the Gospel of salvation, we should help those who are listening, bridge the homiletical chasm from their personal story to God's story.

The Philippian jailer heard the gospel of salvation clearly. After an earthquake that set prisoners free from their cells, he was ready to commit suicide for being responsible for the escape of the prisoners under his charge. When he discovered that Paul and the rest of the prisoners had not fled, he somehow realized his soul was lost and asked Paul the famous question, "What must I do to be saved?" To which Paul replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." (Acts 16:31)⁹ This jailer had served his military shift in earshot of the prisoners, listening to their singing, their praying, and perhaps their encouragement in the Lord. It is quite possible he had heard all about Jesus, but even if he had not, Paul certainly would have made the gospel of salvation just as clear as he did with the Romans where he wrote, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9) Jesus was crucified for this jailer's sins and rose again from the dead in victory over sin and death. This is the gospel of salvation, and it is the power of God to save.

Without evangelism, there is no church. Authors Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley note, "The gospel is a message with objective content, and people must understand that content if they are going to come to Christ for salvation. There are no shortcuts or substitutes to teaching the gospel. It takes more than an invitation to Sunday's service. The Scriptures must be opened and explained."¹⁰ They go on to liken evangelism to the fuel that powers the church's

⁹Acts 16:31.

¹⁰ Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley, *Church in Hard Places: How the Local Church Brings Life to the Poor and Needy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 98.

growth and highlight the theological truth that while it is incumbent upon Christians to proclaim Christ crucified, only the Spirit of God can effectuate the transformation even in the most hardened souls.¹¹

If evangelism is so important to the church, why is the church so bad at it? Alister McGrath suggests, “It is possible for both individuals and churches to become devoted mainly to personal spiritual culture and forget outreach, especially if the process of reaching out involves touching those who may contaminate us. Thus, many protestant churches have in effect become closed systems for the nurture and servicing of the inheritors of a denominational tradition.”¹² Kevin Ford suggests that self-preservation may be a culprit in foregoing evangelistic outreach writing, “All organizations tend to become inwardly focused and narcissistic over time.”¹³ Elliot Clark offers another suggestion writing, “One of the greatest hindrances to evangelism is fear. As feelings of anxiety and dread, the solution isn’t to eliminate all fears. Our absence of appropriate fear is actually the problem. The solution we find in 1 Peter is to fight fear with fear- to grow in our fear of God and our fear for (not of) our fellow man.”¹⁴

The mandate begins with a command to go. Hull wrote, “He charged the church to go to the world, because the world has no reason to go to the church.”¹⁵ Charles Van Engle agrees, “With the term missional, I emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God’s called and sent people.”¹⁶ Tim Keller piles on in *Center Church* writing pithily, “We can no longer

¹¹ McConnell and McKinley, 100-101.

¹² McGrath, *Christian Spirituality*, 149.

¹³ Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 36.

¹⁴ Clark, 50.

¹⁵ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress & Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2006), 254.

¹⁶ David J. Hesselgrave, and Ed Stetzer, eds. *Missionshift: Global Mission Issues in the Third Millennium* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 24.

assume that people will come.”¹⁷ Perhaps this is part of the reason we’ve seen a decline in evangelism in many churches. Mark Shaw quoted Billy Graham in his book, *Global Awakening*, who said “the decline of evangelism in many of the historic churches citing the loss of confidence in the Bible, the preoccupation with social and political issues and the lack of strong theological commitment to evangelism.”¹⁸

Similarly, Samuel Escobar, a prominent Latin American evangelist quoted by Mark Shaw said, “the decline of evangelism in the historic churches had less to do with social action than it did with bad theology.” Shaw went on to write that “For Escobar authentic evangelism must not only declare that ‘the end is at hand’ but must also engage in compassionate action ‘as evidence of our expectation of a new creation.’”¹⁹ That is not a shared view among many evangelicals who see Gospel presentation as the only qualifier in the task of evangelism and harbor suspicion of Christ-centered social services.

Granted, making disciples begins with evangelism, but many churches end with it. For too many churches, there is a call to initial faith so frequently that the teaching of Christ and how to live in light of the Kingdom never sees the light of day nor takes root. Bill Hull quotes Dallas Willard on this point, “We have not only been saved by grace, we have been paralyzed by it.” Hull goes on, “When we see faith as an agreement with a doctrinal test and understand grace as forgiveness of sin alone, we lose the idea that discipleship is normal. And when we lose discipleship, we also lose vibrant Christianity.”²⁰ I have served in churches with this kind of evangelism approach, focusing so much on the “altar call” during and following the sermon that

¹⁷ Keller, 277.

¹⁸ Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 125.

¹⁹ Shaw, 126.

²⁰ Hull, 16.

there is no in-depth teaching on the rich, broad grace of God throughout the whole of life of discipleship. The church fails in its mission on this point alone. Hesselgrave noted as well,

Contemporary evangelism often leads to a hurried decision for Christ with but scant attention to repentance and inadequate explanations of faith and conversion itself. That the Holy Spirit may bring a person to repentance and faith on the basis of minimal knowledge should not be used as an excuse for inadequate instruction. To ask anyone to make such an important decision on the basis of minimal understanding or misunderstanding is ethically indefensible.²¹

Hesselgrave went on later to write, “We might put so much emphasis on the decision point that we forget that the decision process involves incorporation into the new group and the acceptance of its discipline. We place such an emphasis on accepting Christ and being accepted by Him that we may take it for granted that the new believer feels accepted by the believing group.”²² Clearly, Hesselgrave is writing out of a sense of the necessity to add to evangelism a robust follow-up ministry of discipleship in the framework of the church community. Roland Allen agrees, writing, “Souls were not invited to enter into an isolated solitary religious life of communion with Christ: they were invited to enter the society in which the Spirit manifested Himself and in which they would share in the communication of His life.”²³ Evangelism is an invitation into acceptance; it is an acceptance into Christ and an acceptance into community.

Robert Coleman added a note about evangelism, simply writing, “It is not our responsibility to justify his Word; we are responsible only to make it known.” He went on to write, “Nor is our assignment to argue the pros and cons of the subject. God needs no defense. And we need not try to impress people with any supposed gifts of rhetoric or knowledge. The power is in the gospel. Our commission is simply to proclaim with faith and compassion the

²¹ David Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally: North America and Beyond*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 170-171.

²² Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 201.

²³ Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 76.

irrevocable Word of God.”²⁴ The task is to make Him known. If God is at work in the heart of our listener, they will respond accordingly. If not, then they won’t, and we need not worry, only pray.

The individual challenge is to live, and move, and have our being in the light of the truth of Jesus’ invitation to be His disciples for ourselves. Hull confessed, “As a disciple, I am learning from him how to live my life in the Kingdom as he would if he were I.”²⁵ The mission of the church is to continue to issue that invitation through evangelism, and to teach believers what Jesus taught about living life in the Kingdom of God, but to do so in part, by setting an example of what it means to follow Jesus.

Or Discipleship

James Choung takes a different tack. Rather than focusing on evangelism over or apart from discipleship, why not see it as a first step into a much larger purpose?

We do evangelism because Jesus might come tomorrow, but we do discipleship because he probably won’t. It’s a funny quote, but even this idea divorces the two. Instead, what if our discipleship models included evangelism? What if these two were reconciled as deep partners of the same kind of thing: helping our friends, both unbelievers and believers, to trust Jesus more, to do what he did for the reasons he did them?²⁶

Similarly, Henry Blackaby in his groundbreaking workbook for the church, *Experiencing God*, posits that “responding to the Gospel” is the inevitable outcome of a work of the Holy Spirit in a person or church’s life.²⁷ Yet “responding to the Gospel” can happen at multiple stages in the discipleship process. Keller writes, “Because the gospel not only converts nonbelievers but also

²⁴ Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel: The Theology Behind the Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 43.

²⁵ Hull, 16.

²⁶ James Choung, *Real Life: A Christianity Worth Living Out* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 13.

²⁷ Henry and Richard Blackaby, and Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2007), 9.

builds up believers, the church should not have to choose evangelism over discipleship.”²⁸ While an initial response to the gospel may happen at conversion, believers can be reawakened to the truths of the gospel in new and exciting ways, calling them to new areas of ministry and service in the church and the world. David Britt agrees that even believers need to buttress their faith and beliefs by regularly meeting with the church. He writes in his article entitled, *From Homogeneity to Congruence*, “No one is immune to the need to maintain and reinforce his or her beliefs; this is best done in groups whose members share their beliefs. Regular church attendance does not guarantee certainty, but it does tend to reinforce our belief.”²⁹ Yet, while reinforcement of belief is necessary, part of that belief is the responsibility to go and tell; to go into all the world and make disciples. Tim Beougher notes in his seminal work on evangelism that “Some churches have subtly reversed the Great Commission; instead of ‘go and tell,’ it has become ‘come and hear.’”³⁰ The either/or approach of evangelism and discipleship must be jettisoned for a more comprehensive method of making disciples that highlights both the responsibility of believers to grow as disciples and to multiply through evangelism.

One Unified Garden

So, what is the mission in which the church should be engaged? Do not lose this one thing; Discipleship is the mission of the church. The garden is the church, and the fruit are the disciples the church has been commanded to cultivate. But how does that work itself out in the world? The mission of God in Jesus Christ was multifaceted. Jesus, as the new Adam, was sent to be the reality of the Kingdom of God that was lost through sin in the garden. His invitation for disciples to follow Him is about learning to live in the light of the good news of that kingdom.

²⁸ Keller, 291.

²⁹ David Britt, “From Homogeneity to Congruence,” in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 143.

³⁰ Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 12.

Dan Kimball offered as much in his book, *The Emerging Church* writing, “Evangelism offers an invitation into the kingdom instead of a way to get into heaven.”³¹ Jesus’ sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection served as the primary entry point for believers to see and understand the contrast of the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of God, as well as the tension that exists between the time of the inauguration of the Kingdom at Jesus’ first coming, and the consummation of the Kingdom at his second coming. In Jesus there is eternal life! We know this because we have been given the gift of God’s Word.

What Kind of Fruit?

While planting a garden I was once invited by a neighbor in NC to use some starter plants for my tomatoes, cucumbers and okra. As my garden grew, I could not help but notice my row of okra looked exactly like the field of tobacco across the street. Sure enough, I had mistakenly planted a row of tobacco and I was reaping exactly what I had sown, though it was not at all what I intended.

All the church’s ministry, and all the church’s mission comes down to this one task; making disciples by inviting unbelievers to believe, and then teaching those who respond. Bill Hull made it clear writing, “When Jesus commanded, ‘Make disciples,’ He wasn’t simply referring to converts. He wants followers who follow- people who submit to His teaching and ways.”³² Disciple-making is no easy task. For many churches it is more of an ideal than an actual mission. Richard Brohier noted in an email to author Ajith Fernando,

I find that every church I go to is talking about discipleship and disciple-making as a core value- but I somehow don’t see it. It is what I call a preferred value rather than an actual value, much like evangelism is in many situations. It’s what we’re supposed to do rather than what we do, and I guess it is because our culture of individualism sees it as a program rather than a lifestyle of sacrifice and inconvenience.³³

³¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 203.

³² Hull, 43.

³³ Ajith Fernando, *Discipling in a Multicultural World* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2019), 25.

Making disciples is the central purpose of God's mission through the church. This is the heartbeat of Hull's book on discipleship where he writes decisively, "Discipleship isn't just one of the things the church does; it is what the church does."³⁴ To that point, Edmund Chan asks a key question in the opening of his book, *A Certain Kind*. "The compelling question of discipling is not merely: "Are we making disciples?" but rather, "What kind of disciples does God call us to reproduce?" and, more importantly, "What kind of disciples are we?"³⁵ In this sense, the intentionality the church assumes in evangelism must also be translated into intentional discipling with the characteristics of the fully formed disciple in view as the goal. It is not enough to introduce people to Jesus if there is no plan in place to teach them how to worship, study, fellowship, serve, and go. It is no wonder people leave the church in droves when there is no targeted purpose tying the mission of the church to the lives of its people. Church becomes the locus of religious programming rather than the body of Christ designed to serve the world.

Dan Kimball admonishes the church noting that we will naturally reproduce the product we have become, writing, "As the modern church has gotten bigger and more proficient in preaching, we have subtly taught people that they come to church to get their weekly fill-up. And so, in our eagerness to see disciples made, we create consumers."³⁶ Prior to writing this, he had already made the point that within the Evangelical movement in America there is a pernicious Christian sub-culture of consumerism that is much more attractive than the cross which disciples are invited to take up as they follow Jesus. Kimball laid this foundation in an earlier chapter writing, "As we design ministry for the emerging church, we need to introduce people to Jesus, not to the Christian subculture of consumerism we have subtly created. We

³⁴ Hull, 24.

³⁵ Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Discipling that Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 35.

³⁶ Kimball, 222.

need to make sure we are not trying to see them born again into our Christian subculture and changed into one of us instead of being transformed by the Spirit into a disciple of Jesus.”³⁷ In every circle of church members there are concentric circles of insiders who know the jargon and hold the influence. If church membership becomes a kind of game of thrones for people who want a platform to exercise their own religious agendas, no matter how right or sincere, we have missed the point entirely.

Fruit-bearing Gardens

A garden is not planted for the garden’s sake, it is meant to bear fruit for people to enjoy, both for nourishment, and to alleviate hunger. So too, the church is meant not only for its own benefit. Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley tell the story of their ministry in Sao Luis Brazil to street children. Their mission was to find homeless children and place them in good, caring homes. The problem was that the homes were like revolving doors and the kids on the streets were not interested in changing their lives. McConnell and McKinley needed a change of strategy. Rather than focusing strictly on meeting the needs of the children they decided to plant a church. They write,

It became apparent that a majority of them came from one particular poor area on the outskirts of the city. So one day I went to that neighborhood with some Brazilian coworkers, and we began to talk about the possibility of starting a church in the middle of this community. The difference was amazing. In my two years of working with children on the streets, we had not managed to rescue one child from that lifestyle. However, during my time with ‘Good News Church’ (and the many years since my departure) countless children were prevented from ever falling into that world. Some might think it doesn’t really matter who does the job, so long as Jesus is made known. But we think that the church matters for a number of reasons.³⁸

In this case in point the mission did not change. McConnell and McKinley never lost their heart’s desire to reach the homeless children, but they discovered that the church was a better vehicle through which to rescue them. By planting a church, they changed the culture.

³⁷ Kimball, 84.

³⁸ McConnell and McKinley, 86-87.

Granted, the example is atypical, but the motivation shifted from meeting outer, physical needs to inner transformation through meeting inner, spiritual needs. That shift in their central identity from community mission to community church, made all the difference. David Hesselgrave agrees. He writes,

The task is the same anywhere in the world. And community of people without an accessible church is a mission field. And it is the responsibility of believers in existing churches to fill those spiritual voids with believing congregations. As has often been remarked, neither a missionless[sic] church nor a churchless mission is in accordance with the plan of God.³⁹

Jesus did not merely preach to the crowds, he healed them, he fed them, he offered them real hope in a world of oppression. The church is to emulate the Lord in his compassion to the least, the last, and the lost. Robert Coleman writes about the story in the Gospels when four men tore a hole through the roof of a house to lower their friend down so Jesus could heal him. Coleman writes,

Suppose there had been no outward healing. Would this have nullified the greater miracle of spiritual healing? Physical health is not essential to forgiveness, and to the unperceiving may even obscure the real need of people. But physical restoration in this case is a temporary means of silencing the opposition to the claims of Christ, though it does not seem to change attitudes of unbelief.⁴⁰

Jesus' miracles were not merely a means to an end. Jesus intended his followers to enact real and lasting progress toward addressing poverty, sickness, hunger, and oppression. Craig Ellison in his article entitled, *Addressing Felt Needs of Urban Dwellers*, highlights the work of John Wesley in meeting both the spiritual and existential needs of the community. He writes,

John Wesley, one of the greatest evangelists of all time, reached out primarily to the working class. He neglected no opportunity for practical social expression. This man of God who preached more than 45,000 sermons and published 223 books and pamphlets, started the first dispensary in England for medical aid to the poor, organized the Friends Society to aid needy strangers, supported efforts for elementary education, bitterly opposed the slave trade, and encouraged major prison reform efforts. Wesley's view of the biblical mandate was that 'if good works do not follow our faith, even all inward and

³⁹ Hesselgrave, 31.

⁴⁰ Coleman, 77.

outward holiness, it is plain our faith is nothing worth... The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness.⁴¹

Dyrness and Engel note that, “The missionary nature of the church both at home and on the field unfortunately has diminished in the last century because of the dramatic growth of missions agencies, often referred to today as being ‘parachurch.’”⁴² The church is not a byproduct of the missional strategy, the mission is the byproduct of a flourishing, sending church. It is a question of order. Christopher Wright brings this point home in his book *The Mission of God* with his statement, “...it is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, but that God has a church for his mission in the world.”⁴³ A desire to elevate an impoverished community through tutoring, feeding programs for children, workforce training and development, is a noble and Godly aspiration. According to these practitioners, if the base of operations for a mission of this type is not incarnational, that is, in the midst of the suffering it is seeking to alleviate, it will not reach its potential effectiveness. Further, as Hesselgrave has noted earlier, organizations that set out to do good works and meet the existential needs of a community in the name of Christ are not qualified as missions.⁴⁴ However, when these programs are an expression of a local, vibrant, incarnational, evangelical church seeking to fulfill the Great Commission by making disciples, they become a completion of the cycle of God’s mission. The recognition of the existential needs of the community in which the church has been planted and the grace that God has given to his church to meet those needs is what it means for missions to be personified.

⁴¹ Craig W. Ellison, “Addressing Felt Needs of Urban Dwellers,” in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*, ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 101-102.

⁴² James F. Engel, and William A. Dyrness, *Changing the Mind of Missions: Where Have We Gone Wrong?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 75.

⁴³ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 62.

⁴⁴ Hesselgrave, 26.

Cultivating Growth

In a recent online class with Robert Coleman, one of the many profound comments he made was one about church growth.⁴⁵ Coleman encouraged the pastors in attendance not to be apologetic about a focus on church growth. He noted that the Great Commission was the essence of church growth, and that evangelism is the catalyst of a growing church. A bigger garden requires planting a larger space. Whether growing an existing church or planting a new one, the motivation should always be to increase the followers of Jesus and to assist in their personal transformation. Howard Snyder writes in the book, *Five Views: Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*, “A vital, faithful missiology will indeed focus on the life of the church, not in a narcissistic way, but in ways that help the church be what it is called to be: the presence of Jesus Christ in the world for the sake of the salvation of the lost and the full manifestation of God’s reign.”⁴⁶ Faithfulness then, is the key to the mission.

But the church has become confused about that intent, and perhaps a bit embarrassed by the effects. Elliot Clark writes, “We’ve come to believe that God is most glorified, and people are most evangelized when the church is either hip and trendy or when it’s struggling and broken and weak. So, the last thing we’d want to do is portray ourselves as either holy or healthy- and most certainly not better than anyone else.”⁴⁷ Rainer and Lawless are quick to highlight that methods and programs are not the answer.

On my shelves are rows and rows of church growth and leadership books. I have attended dozens of church growth conferences. In some cases one could get the impression from these resources that the secret to growing a church is a proper mixture and order of methodologies and programs. References to God and his sovereignty are infrequent and, in a few cases, absent.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ The class was held on the Charlotte campus of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on Tuesday January 11, 2022.

⁴⁶ Howard Snyder, “A Renewal Response,” in *Five Views: Evaluating the Church Growth Movement*. ed. Paul E. Engle and Gary L. McIntosh (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 196.

⁴⁷ Clark, 119.

⁴⁸ Rainer and Lawless, 14.

Leighton Ford agrees with this sentiment. He writes in his book, *The Power of Story*, “I believe history is forcing the church to clear away the clutter of methods, programs, and techniques that have accumulated around our misunderstanding of evangelism.”⁴⁹ God made the church, not just individuals, for the advancement of the good news. As the church grows and multiplies, so goes the Gospel.

Some church leaders focus less on the individual mandate and more on the corporate function of the church as an agent to reproduce itself. Roland Allen, in his book, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* writes, “St Paul did not go about as a missionary preacher merely to convert individuals: he went to establish churches from which the light might radiate throughout the whole country round.”⁵⁰ Yet how does church-planting square with modern notions of church growth? Some believe semantic adjustments like using the word “multiply” instead of “divide” are not enough to swallow the reality that to plant a church, a congregation necessarily must lose something precious. To plant necessitates that a seed must die. If there is one thing that Christ has taught the church, it is that death does not have the final word. Church plants are made in such ways. A church must necessarily lose part of its membership in order to plant a new membership. The new plant is no longer identified as the old.

Willow Creek was a model of church growth in the 1990's and early 2000's. Their emphasis on small groups was the engine behind their growth.⁵¹ Small group ministry has the potential to accelerate all the best characteristics of the church. It fosters fellowship, prayer, Bible study, even evangelism if done intentionally. Joel Comiskey agrees, at least as it referred to ancient house churches serving as small groups. He writes in his book, *2000 Years of Small Groups* that, “Most scholars agree that early house churches emphasized the following

⁴⁹ Leighton Ford, *The Power of Story: Helping Others Connect with God's Great Story* (Charlotte, NC: Leighton Ford Ministries, 2015), 16.

⁵⁰ Allen, 81.

⁵¹ Mittelberg, 11.

elements: worship, practice of spiritual gifts, teaching, prayer, fellowship, evangelism, the Lord's supper, [and] baptism".⁵² These house churches have the modern-day equivalent of small groups. And while some pastors and church leaders may balk at the idea of a small group considering itself a micro-expression of church, there are others who see this model as the means for planting new churches.

Donald McGavran, the guru of missions and church growth highlights that these small group-turned house churches lack the traditional financial overhead of other church planting models.⁵³ James Westgate agrees in his article, *Church-Planting Strategies for World-Class Cities* that "these congregations are usually pastored by a trained layperson who is bi-vocational and therefore requires only a small salary. Some of these house churches emerge as large congregations."⁵⁴ There are multitudes of models for planting churches, but the small group model threads the needle between church growth and church planting. Comiskey further notes that "When Jesus sent the disciples to do outreach, he chose the small home environment to proclaim his kingdom message."⁵⁵ Of course, Jesus preached to larger gatherings, most notably through the sermon on the mount, but Jesus' primary growth strategy seemed to be through intimate settings with small groups of people doing life together.

Comiskey goes on to cite the Barna research group that "has estimated that by the year 2025, membership in the conventional church will be cut by fifty percent, while alternative movements (like house churches) will potentially involve thirty to thirty five percent of all Christians in the USA."⁵⁶ These are not competing institutions. Small house churches should not

⁵² Joel Comiskey, *2000 Years of Small Groups: A History of Cell Ministry in the Church* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2015), 25.

⁵³ Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 323.

⁵⁴ James E. Westgate, "Church-Planting Strategies for World-Class Cities," in *Planting and Growing Urban Churches: From Dream to Reality*, ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 206.

⁵⁵ Comiskey, 19.

⁵⁶ Comiskey, 213.

take the place of associating and gathering with a larger body, and those in the larger body should not neglect meeting in smaller, more intimate settings. Both are necessary for the health and growth of the church, and church leaders need to recognize and promote this Biblical model of small and large fellowship settings. Rainer and Lawless put this responsibility for church growth on the shoulders of pastors: “The pastor must assume responsibility for growth. Other persons or groups cannot be responsible. When a pastor takes the responsibility for growth, he assumes the risk of failure. Such a price is too high for some pastors.”⁵⁷ In other words, the risk of seeing small group fellowships experiencing success and breaking off to form new church plants takes away from the security, finances, and growth of the larger church and you can’t have your cake and eat it too. This ego-driven sin is at the heart of the institution’s potential demise. Thankfully, Rainer and Lawless acknowledge that “While we must be ever conscious of growth rates, attendance levels, conversions, and other numerically measurable concerns, we cannot let such numbers be our ultimate measures for success. True success is nothing more and nothing less than obedience to God.”⁵⁸

Planting New Gardens

Planting a new church, like planting a new garden requires special attention given to location, soil culture, and an environment where it may flourish. The mission of discipleship begins and ends with Jesus, but it carries on as the church grows. Hesselgrave comes to this subject with a very cynical take, writing, “Is it not sad that, since God cannot count on obedience and wise stewardship in this matter, he often has to use church splits and ad hoc means to get new congregations of believers started?”⁵⁹ I do not agree that God breaks up churches with the express purpose of accomplishing new church plants. Certainly, God does use

⁵⁷ Rainer and Lawless, 147.

⁵⁸ Rainer and Lawless, 29.

⁵⁹ Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 33.

tragic schisms in churches for new movements of His Spirit and expressions of the faith, but God is not the author of division. On this I must passionately disagree with Hesselgrave. But he is not wholly without constructive comments. He lays out a ten-step cycle of planting churches following Paul's model. 1) Missionaries commissioned, 2) Audience contacted, 3) Gospel communicated, 4) Hearers converted, 5) Believers congregated, 6) Faith confirmed, 7) Leadership consecrated, 8) Believers commended, 9) Relationships continued, 10) Sending churches convened.⁶⁰

Allen focuses his book on the methods of Paul and asks an important question, "how he (Paul) could so train his converts as to be able to leave them after so short a time with any security that they would be able to stand and grow?"⁶¹ The answer to that question is that he didn't. Many of those churches Paul launched with leaders he trained, failed morally (the church in Corinth) and doctrinally (the churches in Galatia). The purpose of Paul's letters in many cases was to encourage, but also to rebuke and set right the failings of the body of Christ in those cities. Certainly, there were pastors like Titus and Timothy well-placed to bring leadership and discipline where it was warranted, but in many cases there were lesser known pastors and elders trying to do the work of discipleship from an ill-equipped platform.

Alas, the work of the Holy Spirit in church-planting is greater than the credit we often give Him. But this does not mean we enter the task haphazardly or without strategy. Keller makes the point, "The gardening metaphor shows that both success and faithfulness by themselves are insufficient criteria for evaluating ministry. Gardeners must be faithful in their work, but they must also be skillful, or the garden will fail."⁶² Likewise, the church must be constructed in such a way that it has an outward focus and does not exist simply for its own sake, attempting to get as many butts in seats as a targeted goal. On this Dan Kimball agrees.

⁶⁰ Hesselgrave, *Planting Churches Cross-Culturally*, 48.

⁶¹ Allen, 85.

⁶² Keller, 13.

“The phenomenon of church shoppers has profoundly shaped the contemporary church. The entire conversation is not about relevance but convenience. The focus is not in serving the world; the church itself becomes the focal point.”⁶³ He went on to write, “If we don’t build everything on the biblical definition of what church is, then we will simply be fueling the consumer mindset.”⁶⁴ Bill Hull agreed writing, “Perhaps the question we need to ask ourselves is, ‘Does the gospel we preach produce disciples, or does it produce consumers of religious goods and services?’”⁶⁵ Too many churches are engaged in the latter as a target goal, developing Christian consumers rather than Jesus followers. This was obviously not the purpose for which the church was conceived.

Conclusion

Evangelism and discipleship are not in opposition to one another no more than the planter and the tender of the garden. The healthy disciple is one who is not only taught the doctrines of Christ, but who is walking in obedience to those teachings, including the imperative to go and tell. Well-rounded discipleship includes teaching new believers how to become fishers of men, telling their story, and inviting even more people into God’s saving grace in Jesus.

While planting a church is not the only method for church growth, intentional church growth happens in partnership with and through church planting. It is the catalyst for reaching urban centers with the Gospel of Christ in new ways. Often new churches are formed by and through small groups of disciples who are committed to fellowship, prayer, Bible study, and evangelism. These micro-expressions of church then grow to become larger churches with a hunger to continue to multiply.

⁶³ Kimball, 95.

⁶⁴ Kimball, 97.

⁶⁵ Hull, 44.

Meeting the existential needs of a community can only bear lasting fruit when done through the church seeking to simultaneously meet the spiritual needs of a community. Meeting one set of needs to the exclusion of the other fails to meet the comprehensive mission of God to care for the least, the last, and the lost. This dual mission was Jesus' heartbeat and should also be the driving impulse of his disciples, to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Uniting and Flourishing a Segmented Church through Process-Discipleship

The purpose of this project is two-fold. In a church that has segments or divisions, the first goal is always unity. No institution can create a healthy movement or momentum without unity. The second goal is to set a target toward which the church can move in order to create that unity. A church may have many programs and initiatives, but if it desires unity, it needs a unifying purpose for the entire body to support. The goal is not a point of arrival, but a process to achieve the mission Jesus gave to the church to make disciples. Bethel is a church unified in many ways by its common faith and values, yet there remain certain fissures under the surface that create an environment that feels as if there are multiple groups and centers of power. At Bethel, these segments are largely generational, and I have highlighted three: generational association, generational age, and generational approach.

The segments of generational association are those whose families have been part of Bethel for over a hundred years, some since its founding. I should be clear at the outset that generational association is not a negative characteristic. Praise the Lord that Bethel has this kind of legacy of families whose children and grandchildren have continued to give themselves to this community of faith. But the segmentation of “old Bethel” and “new Bethel” can make it difficult for the church to integrate a growing population to forge into the future.

Generational age as a segmentation is precisely as it sounds. Like many older churches pressing into the future, Bethel’s demographic skews older. This is a beautiful strength, but only if it is harnessed and celebrated. It can be a stumbling block if unity of purpose is not achieved. The focus of the mission can never target one particular generation to the exclusion of the others. Ministry and discipleship must be even handed, though emphasis should be given to areas of need when the circumstances arise.

Lastly, the segmentation of generational approach has to do with style and expression. It highlights the way people dress in the gathering, the culture of art and music, and décor. Unifying generational approach targets the pernicious mantra of dying churches, “This is the way we have always done it.” Uniting and prospering a church segmented by generational association, generational age, and generational approach, is possible through an expressed mission of intentional process-discipleship.

Process Discipleship: Where Do We Go from Here?

Most church leaders would agree that Jesus’ commission to make disciples stands out as a task in which the church should be intentionally engaged. Making disciples is the essential and primary lens through which the entire ministry of the church should be fulfilled. This is not an isolated conviction as Edmund Chan notes in his book, *A Certain Kind* writing, “If the Church is not making disciples, then the Church has lost its central purpose. If so, then the Church has lost its meaning for existence because its primary mission has been compromised. Indeed, discipling anchors the Church to its true mission and purpose.”¹

Making disciples is not like baking a cake with all the ingredients mixed and baked at just the precise temperature and time. It is more like a garden that must be tilled, planted, cultivated, harvested, and when the new season turns the process resumes. But in cultivating a garden, certain components must be present. A flourishing garden needs good soil, water, sunshine, it needs to be cleared of weeds and other living nuisances. It is a process of cultivation. Likewise, discipling is a cultivation process that needs certain components present in order to flourish.

Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck write in their book, *Designed to Lead*, that churches and institutions engaged in leadership development need three critical components for success: Conviction, Culture, and Constructs. Conviction is the God-initiated passion that fuels the leader

¹ Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Discipling that Refines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 86.

and the church that is convinced of why they do what they do. Conviction is the center of the framework. Culture is the inner attitude and what motivates the people; the shared beliefs and values that drive behavior. Culture bridges conviction and constructs. Constructs are the systems and processes designed to actively and outwardly display the convictions. Geiger and Peck note that constructs without conviction produces apathy. Constructs without healthy designed culture produce exhaustion. Conviction without constructs produces frustration.²

At Bethel, leadership development is an important function in the rhythms of church life. New elders and deacons are elected for three-year terms annually. During the time between the election and their ordination/installation I met weekly with these new leaders to study our denomination's Book of Confessions, Essential Tenets, polity, and to discuss how these three components found in the book, *Designed to Lead*, relate to Bethel's mission to make disciples. We made a list of five core convictions which directly correlated to five areas of culture needed to cultivate disciples. The conviction of the Lordship of Jesus Christ leads to a culture of worship. The conviction of the authority of Scripture leads to a culture of study. The conviction that church equals family leads to a culture of fellowship. The conviction of leadership development leads to a culture of service within the church. The conviction of evangelism leads to a culture of outreach beyond the walls of the church. We then organized our programs and platforms to coincide with these convictions and goals for cultural development. It is the ministry of the entire church that makes disciples of Jesus Christ through a process utilizing these five cultural components: worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach.

If one were to ask a group of church leaders if discipleship was a priority in their church, chances are the answer would be, yes. If one were to press a bit further to ask how the church engages in discipleship, the common answer would likely be through its programming.

² Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing Company, 2016), 17.

Most every church develops programs to meet the needs of its congregation. A music program is essential for worship ministry. A Sunday School or Small Group program should be in place to teach people the Bible and theology. Churches might add additional programs for students and children or retirees for fellowship and fun. Every church needs people to serve, so there might be platforms in place for those positions. Finally, most churches have some kind of program to get the church thinking about those outside who are less fortunate or who do not yet know Jesus or his kingdom. The task of a new member in any church will be to determine the programs in which he/she might want to engage. It is as if the church offers a huge menu of options from which a member may choose to be involved, but no direction for that member in how these programs relate to their walk with Jesus and their individual discipleship.

Process-discipleship is about turning that menu of options into a map with a pin-drop for each disciple that says, “you are here.” Then, the map will explain the next step along the journey of cultivating discipleship.³ The five critical areas of ministry in the church (worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach) then become the five components of a flourishing disciple of Jesus. But these components are best met in process rather than all at once or out of order. It would be useless to sow seeds in a garden before the earth is broken and tilled, or to harvest a garden before the fruit was fully grown. Likewise, it would be unwise to invite a brand-new believer to serve on a leadership council without some spiritual growth and time to get to know the church in fellowship and study. Having a member involved in the fellowship ministry of the church while neglecting the study ministry would breed a shallow faith built only around community activity. All five cultural components, worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach are essential for growing disciples of Jesus, yet many churches do not provide intentional platforms for growing in these areas. They merely provide a passive menu of ministry options without direction or intentionality.

³ Geiger and Peck, 200.

As with any map, there are multiple ways to get from point A to point B. The responsibility of the church alongside people who want to follow Jesus is to identify where the individual is currently on the map of their discipleship process. A given disciple may be highly engaged in Sunday School, even teaching on occasion while neglecting times of worship with the body. Another might be faithful in the outreach and evangelism of the church while devoting little to no time to study together with others. A new believer who is in worship and studies together with the church every time the doors are opened will be encouraged to develop deeper friendships within the body through fellowship events and opportunities. The goal is not passively making disciples through programming, but actively, intentionally obeying Christ and making disciples through an articulated process that takes a person from where they are into a deeper love relationship with God and others. The key for Bethel Presbyterian Church will be identifying the segments that exist as obstacles that stand in the way of this process.

Discipleship through Worship

One of my four children once asked me in the hearing of the others which one of them was my favorite. I turned the question back on them and asked which one of them they thought was my favorite. I'm not a perfect father by any stretch, but this may have been my proudest dad-moment as each of them in turn declared their confidence that they were my most beloved. I affirmed their answers. I imagine that God looks upon our frail Sunday gatherings as a father might look upon his children, lovingly receiving the gifts they bring and showering them with affection only a father can give. But I cannot imagine God having a prized church, or a preferred style of worship, or a treasured meeting time, and yet some of these issues have become foremost in our modern, denominational settings.

Change can be difficult and human nature is beset with innate resistance to change. Within the context of mainline and traditional evangelical churches the worship wars of the twentieth century are experiencing a kind of truce. Modern services have been "allowed." Traditional, liturgical services still serve the faithful who love to hear the organ played and a

robed choir leading the singing, but many local churches, including Bethel, have settled into their respective style preferences. In the wake of those worship wars, local churches are left picking up the pieces of hurt feelings and compromised style. While many congregations in the United States settled into a singular style of worship, others had to come to an arrangement of traditional worship alongside contemporary worship. This concession, while somewhat effective in keeping members on the rolls, has now created what feels like competing congregations within the same church. Allocation of resources, space, special celebrations, and vision for the future are all on the table in heated discussion of board rooms. The worship wars may be at a stalemate, but unfortunately the attention is still on music and worship style as the defining characteristic of many churches. There will never be true unity in the church if worship style carries the primary focal point and identity of its members.

The good news is that there is a path to unity among churches with multiple distinct styles of worship through intentional focus on the mission of discipleship Jesus gave to the church. Without discipleship, passionate, authentic worship is elusive. The task for any pastor or leader attempting to unite congregational segments is relationship, which is what the Gospel is all about. Discipleship is the process of training believers how to grow in obedience to Jesus Christ through a relationship with the Holy Spirit, the Church, and the world.

Authentic worship of the Living God is always expressed in one of two ways. First, it is a personal spiritual discipline that an individual expresses daily through, as Paul put it in Romans 12, offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice. Second, it is an intentional gathering of believers of any number responding to God's goodness and grace. We should not have one without the other. D.A. Carson makes this point writing, "We cannot imagine that the church gathers for worship on Sunday morning if by this we mean that we engage in something that we have not been engaging in the rest of the week"⁴

⁴ Mark Ashton, R. Kent Hughes, and Timothy J. Keller, *Worship by the Book*, edited by D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 24.

Worship begins individually by loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.⁵ It is a relationship with the Living God by faith in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross, through the grace of the Holy Spirit who lives in us and empowers us to obey. Without knowing the Lord and His grace, it is impossible to truly worship. Worship begins at this point alone, salvation. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”⁶ Salvation by grace through faith is the essential first step in one’s personal worship of the Living God.

But worship is also designed to be offered corporately with God’s people, and it is this platform of corporate worship where the church bears the responsibility of discipleship. Corporate worship teaches disciples how to approach the Lord and provides vocabulary for our private prayers. The public reading of Scripture and preaching is a means of exalting the centrality of God’s Word and for planting its truths in the hearts of those gathered. Songs of the faith are tools for memorizing the truths of God’s love and grace. Liturgical forms teach us the importance of corporate and private confession, and the grace and assurance of forgiveness. The sacraments remind the church of the work of Jesus Christ through real elements of bread, wine, and water. Corporate worship is a formational and fundamental platform provided by the church for the flourishing growth of every disciple of Jesus Christ.

Constructs for Bethel’s Worship Ministry

If worship is to become a key first step in Bethel’s discipleship process, and becoming a disciple through salvation is the first step in worship, then evangelism must become a central conviction for the church. Presbyterians have traditionally done evangelism differently than

⁵ Deuteronomy 6:5.

⁶Romans 10:9-10.

other evangelical churches. For Presbyterians, evangelism happens through its ministry. Children are raised in the church and invited to place their faith in Christ as their savior in confirmation classes. Inquirers of the church are taught the truths of Christ and invited to place their faith in him when they join the church through baptism, reaffirmation of faith, or transfer of letter. These are not bad ways to engage in evangelism, but they are products of an antiquated model that relies on the community coming to church rather than the church coming to the community. Jesus told his disciples to go, and for the church to obey, the conviction of evangelism must be cultivated to get it out beyond its walls. I will cover more on the conviction of evangelism in the section on outreach.

Upon my arrival at Bethel there were some breakdowns in the order of corporate worship, particularly in the traditional service. That might seem trivial and inconsequential on the surface, but if worship is designed to be a corporate experience with the Living God and a means for unified discipleship, leaders must be thoughtful and prayerful about its form and function. There must be wisdom given to its theme, its arc, the theology that is conveyed in the songs and prayers, and its commission.

The modern service at Bethel followed a typical format for many Presbyterian churches of two to three songs, a children's message, a song during the offering, a message, and a closing song and benediction. There was not much to change by way of format, but there was a disconnect between what was happening on the "stage" and what was happening with the congregation. Meanwhile, the traditional service format felt disjointed. It began with announcements, which is typical, but then moved toward a children's message right at the beginning, after which the children exited and did not participate in any exercise of worship with the rest of the congregation. The choir then sang an introit. From the beginning of the service, it was often fifteen minutes before the congregation was ever invited to participate. Since the church had utilized supply pastors for several months, there was frequently a lack of communication or identification of who was leading the service. This was the first challenge that needed adjustment.

We began the changes by adding a chime on the bells which is the cue for the liturgist and pastor walk forward to the chancel, a clear point for the service to begin. The announcements are given by the same individual every week to aid in continuity. Once the announcements conclude the congregation is invited to stand and greet one another and as they do, the music to a simple, familiar greeting song begins and eventually everyone is invited to sing along. The greeting song is meant to be familiar, a chorus to break the ice and to draw focus as the service begins. The greeting song is followed by the liturgical call to worship and an invitation to sing the opening hymn. When the hymn concludes, the pastor will pray an extemporaneous prayer of adoration and invite the congregation to be seated. The liturgist then reads a portion of Scripture that supports the theological theme and invites the children forward for a message. It is important that the children who leave the service get to experience singing and the reading of Scripture. Their discipleship through worship is just as important as their parents', perhaps more so.

After the children are dismissed, we enter a time of confession liturgy with a corporate prayer of confession, silent personal confession, and an assurance of pardon followed by the familiar Gloria Patri as we stand. While standing, the liturgist leads the congregation in an affirmation of faith from the book of confessions, but generally either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. We sing a middle hymn and then the pastor preaches the message complete with a reading of Scripture. A prayer generally follows the message and people are invited to speak the names of individuals on their hearts who need prayer. The offering is then taken while the choir presents an anthem, followed by the doxology and prayer of thanksgiving offered by the liturgist. A closing hymn and benediction conclude the service. There are changes from week to week for special events like baptisms, prayers for mission teams, special presentations, but the standard liturgical form provides a consistency that helps the congregation know what to expect and to participate.

The difficulty with the modern service at Bethel is the space. Bethel's modern service meets in the gym. They have crafted some beautiful wood backdrops and the farmhouse décor

with candles is appealing, but it is impossible to be in the space and not feel like you've dressed up a basketball gymnasium. The congregation sits far away from the "stage" and spread out. The lights are difficult to balance between the lower "contemporary feel" and the ability to read a print Bible, and the energy level in the room is consistently low due to all of these various obstacles. I am not confident these issues can be overcome in the current space. In the future, a worship space that meets the needs of both the traditional and modern services would set the stage for greater unity in our worship culture. The key, for now, will be a focus on the depth of theology in the music and preaching, moments of congregational participation other than singing, and a higher level of energy in presentation.

The two services are an expression of the segmented generational approach. It needs to be articulated again that the participants in the two services do not represent the segmented generations as a rule, but rather as a broad-brush characterization. There is no attempt, nor will there be for a permanent blended service. While some might see wisdom in this approach, it minimizes the best of both expressions while attempting to meet in the middle. However, periodic blended services that celebrate the unity of the church are now being encouraged to remind people from both services that Bethel is bigger than our individual, generational, stylistic preferences and approaches.

We held a blended service in the Sanctuary for my installation that included praise songs led by the band as well as hymns led by the organ and choir. A blended service was held to mark the beginning of the fall season. A congregational meeting was held afterward to elect new officers and a fellowship lunch ended the day together. The next blended service will be held in order to ordain and install these new officers, followed by a mission and ministry fair and another fellowship lunch. As Christmas and the New Year approaches, we will be adding several blended services to bring the congregation together in worship as part of our intentional process of discipleship.

One final discipleship platform which needs to be developed out of the worship ministry is spiritual development, and specifically, a prayer ministry. The church prays every time

it meets. Bethel prays in worship, in Bible studies, and when it meets for fellowship. Bethel prays when ministry teams meet and as it goes out into the community. All of this is good and will continue to be encouraged, but I also intend to develop a prayer ministry designed specifically for that purpose alone, out of the worship ministry. Prayer must not become a perfunctory activity we do as we begin and/or conclude meetings. Prayer is an activity God's people are encouraged to engage with all of their hearts. A platform designed specifically to pray for the church and its vision and mission, to pray for the community and its flourishing, to pray for the nation and God's blessing, and to pray for the peace of the world will be developed in the coming months.

Discipleship through Study

I have been part of churches who call their Christian Education ministry simply, "Discipleship", as if discipleship can be boiled down to the one ministry of Christian education. If this were the case, Jesus would have met his disciples every day in a classroom instead of having them follow him from town-to-town meeting and eating with people. Likewise, the commission to make disciples will not simply be done in a Sunday School classroom. The surprising revelation is that many churches unwittingly relegate the central task of discipleship to this one ministry area simply by their misplaced verbiage. It communicates to the congregation that the other ministries of the church are programs unrelated to their discipleship. Clearly, the argument in this project is that all the ministries of the church should have a crucial role in the intentional spiritual, intellectual, and social formation of disciples.

And yet, while study and Christian education is not the all-encompassing path to becoming a disciple of Christ, it is an essential component. Through study we learn the Scriptures and God's redemptive history from creation, the garden, all the way to Jesus and the dissemination of the Gospel to the nations in the book of Acts. Through study we grow in our knowledge of church history from the ancients like Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine to the reformers of Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, and on into the Great Awakening revivalists of Jonathan

Edwards, George Whitefield, the Wesley's, and so on. It is well enough to merely know their names or certain accomplishments, but through study we learn the importance of how the church arrived at where it is today and how the ideas of Augustine shaped John Calvin and John Knox and ultimately the Presbyterian theology and polity that shapes Bethel's ministry today. Through study we see the various theological movements throughout history like the Roman Catholic doctrines that came to be challenged by Martin Luther and later reformed by John Calvin. And through study we learn and discuss how the ancient text of the Bible is not only the final authority for our lives and ministry, but how its relevance is timeless.

The study ministry has taken different forms over the years. The classical style of learning involved the three stages of grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. Grammar taught memorization of facts and ideas. The dialectic stage involved logic, questions, and argument. The rhetoric stage happened as students began to put the facts and logic together in order to present their own teachings. Today's educational approaches in the church are much different. Many times, the stages stop at the dialectic. Whether small group Bible studies or Sunday School classes, there is usually one presenter or teacher assigned for an indefinite period of time and the rest of the class absorbs the information, sometimes with active discussion and sometimes passively. Occasionally there is homework, mostly harkening back to the grammar stage.

Common wisdom says that one learns more when one is required to teach, yet the rhetorical stage is a rarely used tool in discipleship through study in the church. Coupled with this trend is the almost universal truth that twenty percent of the church does eighty percent of the necessary service. Disciples need to begin sharing their faith experiences, presenting ideas for discussion, and teaching others what they are learning in their personal study.

Studying is an activity that can be accomplished individually without the need to gather with the church, and indeed should be encouraged. Every believer should read the Bible and be engaged in some sort of study for their own personal edification. This is good and right and part of the growth of disciples. Yet as a church called to make disciples, it is incumbent for

the church to provide those platforms where disciples can learn and grow together in community through the study of Scripture and theology.

Constructs for Bethel's Study Ministry

Bethel has a long history of robust Sunday School. Upon my arrival there were three primary classes serving three generations of Bethel members. Granted, there were outliers of younger people in the older classes and vice versa, but generally the classes were segmented by generational age. This is not necessarily a negative characteristic, but with this arrangement the younger church loses the rich wisdom and knowledge of the older generation in study, and the older church misses out on the creative energy of the younger generations. Rather than turning over the fruit basket and completely disrupting the established order, I decided to take a different tack initially in the attempt to unify the generations in discipleship through study.

A Wednesday night study was not a novel concept to Bethel; indeed, it was a fixture of past ministry, but had long been removed. Perhaps it was the busyness of the Lake Norman culture, or the traffic generated by the I-77 construction, or maybe even the Covid disruption, but it had been years since Bethel had a Wednesday night study. Rather than merely teaching through a book of the Bible, I decided to use a tested study that involved some homework and discussion. We settled on *Experiencing God* by Henry and Richard Blackaby, and called the evening, "Wednesday Night Together." The idea was that I would also preach a twelve-week series on the chapter topics to reinforce the lessons that were being learned in the study. The results have been remarkable, but more on that in the next chapter.

Initially we thought we might get a solid turnout of about fifty people for dinner and study. I met with another non-active pastor who belongs to Bethel to lay out a strategy of meeting with no more than twenty-five people per breakout group. We would watch the fifteen-minute videos together as a large group and then divide them up into two groups. The trouble started when signups broached sixty people right away. Then it pushed up beyond seventy-five and I knew we needed a third group. As signups increased, I realized the hunger for

study and spiritual growth at Bethel was immense. We ended with one hundred forty signed up for the study and knowing we would have some attrition we decided to settle on five discussion groups.

This became an opportunity to bridge the generational age segment that existed in the Sunday School ministry. Since I am a new pastor to Bethel, and people might be inclined to want to be in my discussion group, we decided to make stationary groups while the five discussion leaders rotated. By doing this, all the discussion leaders were able to reach and impact all of the members of the study at various times. Additionally, we decided to be intentional with the age and association segments. We placed people in groups who had been in the church for decades with newer people. We placed younger people alongside older people. We mixed it up well and have only had one person comment that they would like to meet more people their age. To that comment we were able to encourage attendance in Sunday School, a ministry in which they were not currently engaged.

The discussion leaders were chosen with great intentionality. We had five groups and two were accounted for with me and the other pastor. We prayed and looked through the list of those who had signed up to attend as individuals who might be qualified to lead a group. The first requirement, as should be the case whenever choosing people to stand in front of a group, is that they love Jesus and live lives that reflect Biblical principles. The second requirement was that these individuals were not currently involved as leaders in any other major ministry in the church. The idea was two-fold. We wanted to spread the opportunities of service (beyond the twenty percent who do eighty percent of the work), and we wanted to give certain individuals a platform for rhetorical learning. Three other individuals were chosen and agreed to lead the groups in rotation for the twelve-week study. I look forward to seeing the fruit from this Wednesday night class.

The next step of discipleship in the study ministry was to establish a young adult Sunday school class. While Bethel has a large demographic of older people, there is a subsection of college-aged and young adults on the fringes who can be gathered for intentional

discipleship through study. While this class may further entrench the segmentation of generational age, it is necessary to galvanize that portion of Bethel's membership by providing a space for that demographic to gather. There will likely be a time when the Sunday classes will be reconstituted by subject matter rather than by generational association and generational age, but that initiative may be a few years from now.

In addition to weekly classes, we are considering twice-annual seminars on topics such as how to share your faith, apologetics, and church history. Home Bible studies will also be a topic of conversation next year in conjunction with a neighborhood outreach initiative. The ultimate goal in this process of discipleship is movement from the front door of worship to this next step of study through the platforms and constructs that Bethel has in place. The more on-ramps to these areas of study that exist, the easier it will be for new people, and even long-time members to take their next step in discipleship through study.

Discipleship through Fellowship

Fellowship in the church is one of those spiritual benefits that can happen anywhere. People gather together for coffee before or after the Sunday service, and there's even a time built into the service for people to say, "Good Morning." Wednesday night dinners provide a great platform to get to know new people in a deeper way that is not possible in the worship service or Sunday school class. I tell Bethel often that it is not enough to be a friendly church, you must be a church where one can make friends. It is difficult to impossible to build deep friendships in the limited times between services or before and after Sunday School. Deep fellowship that fosters discipleship happens in more non-structured environments like retreats, life groups, and around a table during a meal. The model of fellowship in Scripture often revolved around the table. Israel had festivals and celebrations built into their religious seasons for home and table fellowship.

Many people in our churches and in our neighborhoods have no nearby family. Twenty-first century careers take families to the far reaches of the country, and until those

intimate friendships are established, there is simply no one to call for a 2:00 a.m. emergency. For the church to be effective in providing this platform for fellowship it needs to recognize that the world has changed. While there may still be generational association segments and groups of families that have remained in the community for decades, many people simply do not share the benefit of those close, long-time associations. No amount of missional verbiage will create this healthy environment. It takes people willing to recognize the needed areas of growth and willing to open wide the doors of friendship. Bethel is well on its way in this regard, but it can still use some encouragement along the way.

Constructs for Bethel's Fellowship Ministry

Last summer Bethel held what it called a Bethel Barn Bash. It was essentially a church-wide picnic at the home of one of its members. Hundreds were in attendance. It was overwhelming. There were new and long-time members, young and old, and everyone in between with food and games and music. It was an ideal fellowship event for unifying the church beyond all the segments of generation. But Bethel needs more fellowship activities like this, geared to unify these segments.

Small fellowship groups have multiple functions. Many small groups or life groups are Bible studies that meet in the homes of its members. They are committed to studying the Word and praying for each other, but their overall purpose is in building relationships that will last. People need each other, and discipleship does not happen effectively in isolation. A new small group ministry initiative will be launched next year for the purpose of building relationships between demographically diverse members of the church. It will be designed intentionally to engage generations and long and short-term members. The term for a new small group will be twelve months. Groups will be encouraged to meet weekly when able, to work through chosen material, and to pray together. Given that Bethel already has Sunday school and several other study opportunities available, the expressed purpose of this new initiative will be fellowship.

Another goal of the Fellowship ministry at Bethel in the next several years is to develop regular retreats for men, women, and the entire church. It is important that the church does not plan so many activities that members are overwhelmed with activity and unable to participate. Retreats need to be strategically placed on the calendar. Rather than planning a year out, retreats need a multi-year approach that targets these events in order to capitalize on the time and rhythms of church life.

There are churches who, rather than going away, plan on-campus events designed to accomplish the goals of a retreat. I have found that a Saturday seminar simply does not have the same effect as a weekend retreat. During a retreat, time is scheduled for recreation, seminars, worship, and games. Retreat hikes, shopping trips and bonfires are unique opportunities for building memories and making new friends. All-church retreats will be scheduled every other year, and retreats for the men's and women's ministries will also be scheduled on the off years, every other year. In this way, the anticipation builds, and the planning team has more time to make these events desirable and memorable.

The Presbyterian Women and Men of the Church now fall under the Fellowship Ministry. The Presbyterian Women will continue to meet and to serve the community, and the men have developed a new monthly breakfast meeting. Life groups, annual and bi-annual retreats, men's and women's fellowship, the Bethel Barn Bash, cookouts, Wednesday night dinner, all combine to provide the necessary, intentional platforms for discipleship through fellowship at Bethel.

Discipleship through Service

Church growth and leadership books talk about the pernicious subculture of Christian consumerism. Are our gatherings designed to make disciples or to make customers of our religious products? Unwittingly, there are churches designed to provide a spiritual product through excellent music, preaching, and exciting community activities. People may pay for these services with their time and their financial offerings for a while, but the expectation will always

be the exchange of high-quality spiritual services for time and resources. This is a very broad-brush characterization, but religious consumerism is indicative of many of the mega churches that have gained a footing in our cities.

Paul taught in Ephesians 4 that the apostles and prophets, the evangelists, pastors and teachers were not supposed to do all the work of ministry. Their role was to equip the people of God for service within the church and even beyond.⁷ Disciples are meant to serve and to be the ministers. I once had a pastor who changed the church sign. The sign had identified the pastor as the “minister.” He changed his identification to “Pastor” and where it said “Ministers:” he added, “all God’s people.” It was bold, but words and verbiage carry weight. The church simply does not function without its members being willing to serve. Without singers, there is no choir. Without cooks, there is no Wednesday night dinner. Without teachers, there are no classes. Without people with servant hearts, the physical building falls apart and so does the church. Service is a stewardship of the time and talents of members for the benefit of the other members.

Another pastor friend I knew once threatened to vacate the pulpit in order to keep the nursery if his church continued to have trouble finding people to serve. One Sunday as the service began no one knew where the pastor was. Sure enough, he was on the floor with the toddlers. They did not have trouble finding members to keep the nursery after that.

At Bethel, members are reminded during baptisms, especially for infants and young children, that they are making promises to come alongside families in the discipleship of their children and students, and that discipleship is their responsibility. If discipleship for members at Bethel involves worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach, then it remains that the affirmative answer to these covenant questions at baptism means that giving one’s time and energy in service through one’s spiritual gifts is a necessary activity. This ownership and

⁷Ephesians 4:11-13

responsibility is what separates religious consumerism from spiritual service. It is often in these moments that we ask people to serve as Sunday School teachers for our children and students.

Constructs for Bethel's Service Ministry

The segments of generational association and generational age rear their heads here. The expressed sentiment is that the leadership of the Session and the Diaconate are always filled with the same people. The perception and the articulation of this sentiment can present as reality, even if the truth of the matter is changing. It should be noted that even though service is part of what it means to be a disciple and a crucial component of discipleship, it is extremely difficult to find people willing to say yes to a three-year term as a church officer in leadership. This difficulty does not belong to Bethel alone, it has been the same in every church in which I have served. There may be ways to ease these responsibility burdens like shorter terms, or shared responsibility. Alas, those ideas must come at a later date. For now, organizing those who say yes to service in the church is a top priority.

This past October Bethel celebrated another service milestone as it ordained and installed new deacons and elders. This service was followed by a fellowship lunch and a mission and ministry fair. One of the common types of feedback I receive is that people would like to serve, they just do not know who to speak to or how to begin. This mission/ministry fair was an opportunity for members to take their next step in discipleship, growing as a servant at Bethel in any one of the various opportunities for service. The fair was a designed on-ramp, one of many, for the members of Bethel to take a next step in their discipleship journey through service. There are plenty of service opportunities to share, but the needs, platforms, and on-ramps need to be developed and communicated in order for service in the church to be an effective discipleship component.

Several of the open-ended comments received as part of the Healthy CHAT survey focused on the need for teaching about spiritual gifts. To meet this need, and as part of the Experiencing God series, I preached a mini-series on the importance of the church operating in

its spiritual gifts. Paul articulates several lists of spiritual gifts in his various letters. While believers are not limited to one singular gift, it is a reminder that each believer brings something unique to the body of Christ. Spiritual gift inventories can be helpful for people who are motivated to find out about their soul motivations. While encouraging these inventories, it is also important that they do not become the sole determiner of where a member might serve. If there are thirty people who indicate a spiritual gift of teaching, there might not realistically be thirty platforms for those individuals. A gift survey can be helpful to stir the motivation of the church toward service if the follow-up is organized and thorough, otherwise it becomes merely another initiative that falls flat due to inattention.

Bethel is in a place of transition. People speak about what Bethel has been and what it will be, but we find ourselves in this space of anticipation where convictions and culture need to find constructs in order to come alive. Rather than reinventing the wheel, it can be helpful to look back to see if there are any systems or constructs for service that flourished in the past that can be salvaged.

The new elders and deacons have differing responsibilities. In the case of deacons, rebuilding an old system is appropriate. Before Covid, the deacons had two basic responsibilities. They served on the various ministry teams that were chaired by elders, and they served as ushers and greeters during worship services. During and following the Covid shutdown, people, including deacons, were slow to return. The church had to call on elders, and former officers to step up to these roles. Planning and training took a back seat. Then, as a product of necessity, it was written into policy that the greeting and ushering ministry would no longer be solely the deacon's responsibility but shared by elders, deacons, and basically anyone who wanted to serve. Those numbers dwindled further. The old adage applies here, if a specific area of service is everyone's responsibility, it is no one's responsibility.

As the new diaconate begins to take shape, these eighteen individuals are being divided into three teams who will serve a month at a time as ushers/greeters. Four individuals from the team will be assigned every Sunday of the team's month to be present from the time

doors open until the time the last person departs. The roles are posted publicly and if an individual who is scheduled cannot be present, he/she is responsible for finding a replacement. In this way, there are four individuals serving as the dedicated hosts for all the activities of the morning on Sundays. Greeters have the most important role for newcomers to any church. A guest will likely decide within the first three minutes whether they like a church and if the greeters perform their service well, that raises the chances that guest will return.

Further, the deacons serve on the nine ministry teams. Other members of the church are also invited to serve on the teams at large, but as deacons, it is part of their official role. Consideration is given to each deacon and their preference of which team they would like to serve. Ideally, each deacon is matched with a team in their gifting and/or expertise. This is not always possible, but an attempt is made. Additionally, deacons through their role on these ministry teams are seen as more than usher/greeter staff. They serve to make decisions and chart direction for the ministry in which they participate.

There are currently nine elders corresponding to the nine ministry teams they lead. Each year three roll off and three more join. Ideally there would be someone experienced in each team to roll into those positions of leadership when the elders rolled off, creating a kind of leadership pipeline. That pipeline is in development. Elders at Bethel lead the ministry teams, but as a Presbyterian Church, the elders also meet together as the primary leaders for the congregation on a board called the Session. All the major decisions for the church are made at these meetings of the Session, but the Session is not merely a deliberative, decision-making body. As of February 2023, the elders of Bethel now make it a priority to worship and pray together for the church's people and activities. They are frequently reminded that this responsibility of prayer for the church is their highest priority and biblical obligation as servants and leaders of Bethel.

Serving as deacons or elders is not the only role in which people can serve the congregation. The church needs musicians, teachers, youth and children's workers, cooks, cleaners, chair and table stackers, music and audio/video volunteers, liturgists, grounds keepers,

and prayer warriors. Serving the body of Christ is a key component in discipleship. Like breathing in and breathing out, so disciples receive the ministry of the church, and in turn give it right back. It is an opportunity to discern one's spiritual gifts in order to be used by the Lord for the building of the body. It is up to the church to provide those platforms and encouragements for people to take that next step in their discipleship.

Discipleship through Outreach

The church will die if it serves only itself. It was William Temple who was famous for saying, "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."⁸ Christians are meant to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God to the outside world through its message and its ministry. The church has a message of hope and salvation for unbelievers, and a taste of the Kingdom of God. That mission and message is lost if the church does not actively disciple its members in the work of outreach.

The last step in the discipleship process is outreach. It involves evangelism and church planting, but it also involves being a blessing to the community in which the church is planted. The Bible speaks frequently about being a prophetic voice of justice for the poor and marginalized. This prophetic voice in the world comes from the church. Jeremiah encouraged the exiles to bless their Babylonian neighbors and to seek the prosperity of the city. This kind of outreach goes beyond evangelism and church planting. It involves building hospitals, health clinics, homeless shelters, food banks, and homes for children and battered women. Mark DeYmaz, in his book, *Disruption*, elaborated on this idea writing, "Churches in more affluent areas should choose to get involved in specifically defined under-resourced areas of their city. Perhaps your church could open an office, rent an apartment, or purchase a house or building in the target area to establish an incarnational presence. Indeed, a community will more readily

⁸ New World Encyclopedia contributors, "William Temple," *New World Encyclopedia*, , https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/p/index.php?title=William_Temple&oldid=981927 (access ed December 11, 2023).

receive you when you are, in fact, a part of it.”⁹ Gone are the days when the church held a highly respected place in society, when people respected the local pastor and honored holy days and holy moments. These days if you want to be heard by the community at large, you must earn that right. Before the church can begin to be heard on the invitation to the Kingdom, they need to demonstrate its reality. This is a change in generational approach from the past when the invitation was given to the community to come to church. Now the invitation must be given to disciples to go out, and this is an opportunity to grow in unity in Christ.

Disciples do not simply benefit from being in the Kingdom, they are taught to pray for and to demonstrate the Kingdom now, as it is in heaven. To this end, Deymaz writes, “We stopped asking the question, ‘how do we help families in poverty?’ and instead asked, ‘How do we get families out of poverty?’”¹⁰ The world is changing. It has already been noted that we should not assume people are going to show up at church like they used to, but something else has changed. Dan Kimball puts a finger on it writing, “From a non-Christian perspective in post-Christian times, Christians are often the wicked ones, and perhaps understandably so.”¹¹ From politics to policy, the church is taking stands on culture wars for the worse. It is incumbent for the church to stand for and speak the truth about moral and ethical issues that collide with the teachings of Christ in the Scriptures. It is a travesty for the church to align itself with political parties in order to do so. People have a hunger for truth, just not from the same places where our fathers and grandfathers preached it.

For the church to be effective in its evangelism, it also needs to be relevant in its desire to look like Jesus by healing the sick, blessing the poor, speaking good news to the lost. DeYmaz went on to write, “It is long past time for the American church to recognize that lament,

⁹ Mark DeYmaz, *Disruption: Repurposing the Church to Redeem the Community* (Nashville: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017), 104.

¹⁰ Deymaz, 150.

¹¹ Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 80.

corporate repentance, reconciliation, and justice are not peripheral to the gospel but intrinsic to it.”¹² The view of the church from the outside is not currently characterized by these virtues.

Tim Keller skillfully crafted six marks of a missional church:

1) The church must confront society’s idols. 2) The church must contextualize skillfully and communicate in the vernacular. 3) The church must equip people in the mission in every area of their lives. 4) The church must be countercultural for the common good. 5) The church must itself be contextualized and should expect nonbelievers, inquirers, and seekers to be involved in most aspects of the church’s life and ministry. 6) The church must practice unity.¹³

These marks are attractive to the unbeliever who might be skeptical of the typical church but hungry for authentic faith. The attempt begins with love for the neighbor who does not look like you. Love in this way does not forsake the truth of the Gospel but seeks to be the conduit of the Gospel for those people whose categories of love are so limited by society’s propaganda.

Constructs for Bethel’s Outreach Ministry

Bethel’s outreach ministry is bolstered by financial resources with over ten percent of its contributions being designated for outreach. That translates to over one hundred thousand dollars a year that goes specifically toward mission and outreach initiatives in the community and around the world. This is a blessing for the community as well as for Bethel, but it needs to be communicated. Many members of Bethel are unaware of the financial gifts given by Bethel to the community. There are moments when teams are formed and sent to various parts of the world. Last summer Bethel sent two trips. The youth ministry was sent with a regional ministry called Son Servants to work with elderly and handicapped people in Chattanooga Tennessee around their homes and with local food banks in sorting and organizing supplies. Another team was commissioned and sent to Nicaragua to prescribe eyeglasses and build baby cribs for young

¹² DeYmaz, 83.

¹³ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 274.

mothers who had gone through parenting classes. The church sees these teams, prays for them, and is interested in their reports on their return, but there are many other outreach and mission projects that go unnoticed and unknown.

Bethel must be better at communicating its ministry by providing platforms for people to serve. To that end, the mission team was intimately involved in the mission and ministry fair. This was an opportunity for people to learn more about various local and international missions and to find out how to become involved. Additionally, I plan to invite the mission team to give a monthly minute for missions as part of our worship services, along with ways to get involved. It is easy to write checks, but discipleship through outreach happens when we celebrate what God is doing through the church, and as we put our hands and feet to the task.

Bethel partners with several local community ministries including The Neighborhood Care Center and Watchmen of the Streets. The Care Center provides tutoring services for local children and vocational training to immigrants and low-income residents. It is designed as a “leg up” out of poverty. At Thanksgiving, Bethel was invited to take part in providing traditional holiday meals for local residents. This partnership is continuing to grow as we find new ways for people to get involved tangibly. The Watchmen likewise meet needs of area homeless neighbors. People who need tents and sleeping bags, coats, socks, food, and other resources can find them with the Watchmen. Area churches including Bethel are invited to go and meet with neighbors in dire circumstances for prayer, evangelism, and resource distribution twice a month. Those are just two of the many local ministries Bethel is ready to support in greater ways in the coming years.

During the next budget year, the mission ministry is being encouraged to allocate a portion of their budget to a church-planting fund. Bethel does not currently have a fully developed vision for planting a church, but this is a beginning. A collaboration with the Christian Education team will see members encouraged to begin home Bible studies in the coming year. These home studies will serve multiple functions. They are not designed for Bethel members,

though they will be led by them. In the model of William Temple, these neighborhood Bible studies are designed for neighbors who are unchurched who might find meeting in a home for dinner and a study to be less intimidating than an invitation to church. Additionally, the Christian Education team is being encouraged to host seminars that train members in apologetics and introduce tools for communicating their faith to neighbors in winsome ways.

The largest outreach ministry of Bethel by far is its Preschool. There are over seventy-five children representing almost as many families meeting on the church campus several days a week and many of them do not have a church home. Preschool families can find an education in many different places. That they have chosen Bethel means that God is at work in some way, big or small, to bring life through the gospel of Christ. While Bethel has not been as intentional with its outreach with the Preschool in the past, new initiatives are taking shape to change this trend. We're setting up monthly coffee meetups. I am participating in a weekly chapel service and teaching the children songs so they can be invited to come sing at Christmas time in worship. Relationships are being built by one of our children's ministry coordinators. The inroads are being established, the seeds are being planted and the garden cultivated.

Conclusion

Divided segments within a given church are not always evident on the surface. Sometimes they grow up subtly through generations and create untenable division. This is not the future of Bethel. While the segments of generational association, age, and approach have been identified, the unity of the church through an intentional discipleship process is within reach. Unity in the church is essential in accomplishing the mission to make disciples. This project has proposed that the mission to make disciples is the vehicle through which the church can create that unity.

There is no such thing as non-discipleship Christianity. Churches that believe they are making disciples through passive programs may be going through the motions, but they are not seeing people transformed by following Jesus. The commission given to the church to make

disciples of Jesus Christ is clear, and the church needs to be just as clear about how it intends to accomplish this mission. For Bethel, making disciples involves providing platforms of involvement and growth for people as they follow Jesus in worship, in study, in fellowship, in service, and in outreach. As each disciple is encouraged to grow in these five steps of discipleship, I hope to see Christ's kingdom become more and more evident on earth as it is in heaven through the continued ministry of Bethel Presbyterian Church.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

The Assessment

And they all lived happily ever after. These words are found at the end of fairy tales, but real life never puts quite such a definitive period on circumstances, especially in the church. There are seasons of accomplishment and of reaching goals, but there are many more seasons of change and growth, seasons of learning and adjustment. We do not like to admit it, but there are also seasons of decline. The assessment needed in each season begins with honesty, truth, and hope. Honesty takes a hard look at the current situation to determine where there are areas of success and where things need improvement. Truth is the plumbline whereby effectiveness, growth, and trajectory are measured. Hope is believing that God is actively involved in and through all the decisions and motivations that move the church into the future.

The goal for this project was unity through mission. Uniting and prospering a church segmented by generational association, generational age, and generational approach, is possible through an expressed mission of intentional process-discipleship. While it would be wonderful to report that the project was successful, disciples are being cultivated, and unity is being forged, it is much more accurate to report that the project has simply begun. The initial phases of a new discipleship initiative have been activated and some success has been noted, but there is much work yet to be done.

The implementation of a discipleship process can be a cultural sea change in a church where discipleship is mostly a passive byproduct. The challenges at Bethel in this season of ministry have been varied. Following intervals of instability, turmoil with the pandemic, and interim periods of leadership struggles, Bethel has emerged on solid footing with a hopeful and positive ministry trajectory. But gardens do not grow overnight and change within a church takes careful cultivation and patience. As a new pastor these past twelve months were a kind of honeymoon with Bethel. Developing relationships was the highest priority, but discipleship was

a close second. Moving into year number two means seeing the beginnings of these seedling ideas take root and nurturing them along to maturity.

The work of a pastor, according to the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus, is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.¹ The mission of the church of Jesus Christ has discipleship at its very core, and in this project, I sought to establish these five ministry areas as the means through which that task is accomplished at Bethel: worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach. One initial observation involved generational segments. It was apparent that Bethel was segregated by longevity of membership, by age, and by style preference.² If the mission of discipleship was to be effective at Bethel, these ministries needed to reach across the generational segments to bring unity. This kind of unity is organic, from the ground up, but the natural default in many churches is a movement toward segmentation. For unity to be cultivated there needed to be an intentional plan.

The project began by establishing these five critical areas of ministry as key, growing traits, both in the programs of the church and in the individual lives of the disciples at Bethel. The idea was to inject ideas and energy into the programs to create a discipleship process. A disciple at Bethel would be encouraged to assess their own “location” in the process beginning with engagement in worship and culminating with outreach opportunities. The program ideas experienced great success, but the discipleship process at the individual level still needs significant development.

¹ Ephesians 4:11-12.

² It is worth noting once again that these segments were not hostile or otherwise aggravated. They were merely groups of people who naturally chose to congregate themselves into these observable segments.

Points of Successful Growth

Combined Worship Services

During officer training in September one of the incoming deacons declared that the scuttlebutt was that I wanted to establish one combined, blended worship service. Rumors tend to grow legs, but I needed the right moment to address a rumor like this. One of the reasons for this rumor was the frequency of unified worship services I was implementing, which tend to be roughly once a quarter. Knowing that we were planning a unified service at the end of October to celebrate and ordain our new officers, I chose this moment to address the congregation on this “scuttlebutt.” While I do not usually give the announcements at the beginning of services, I took a moment to step down onto the floor and to exclaim how wonderful it is to be together, to worship and fellowship together. People smiled and nodded their heads in approval, and then I pivoted. “And while it is exceedingly lovely to worship and fellowship together in a blended service occasionally, I want you to know without equivocation that I am firmly committed to Bethel’s two distinct expressions of worship.” I told them that I had heard a rumor that my desire was to bring our services together permanently, and I put that rumor to rest once and for all.³

While that decision, and that moment, may appear on the surface to contradict the goal of this project- to create unity of generations through discipleship in worship- it gave reassurances that the congregation was not going to lose something precious for the sake of a pastor’s ambitious initiative. Uniting our generational segments through worship can still be accomplished through these carefully planned unified services, and indeed has proven successful. Bethel’s blended services take two forms based on which room in which they are situated. The Sanctuary gives the service a more traditional flavor, while the Worship Café has a feeling of modernity. Blended services have been held in both spaces and in both cases the

³ The combined worship service was held on October 29, 2023.

enthusiasm of the congregation is palpable. Bethel enjoys worshipping together on occasion. Bethel experiences true unity in worship when it comes together. But Bethel's identity is also a church that worships through two different expressions, and unity can still coexist with that diversity.

The engagement and enthusiasm of Bethel's blended services cannot be overstated. People genuinely loved being together, but Bethel is not ready for or interested in a permanent blended service. On the Sanctuary side, there is too much nostalgia for the traditional choir, the regalia, the reformed liturgy, and the hymns led by the organ and piano. On the Worship Café side people want to push the edges of modern music and the relaxed atmosphere. Attempting to meet permanently in the middle of these passions would only breed frustration and loss of the elements that make those expressions uniquely what they are.

Wednesday Night Together

Wednesday Night Together was a huge part of the project cultivating unity through study and fellowship. Overall, it was a great success. Some of this success can be attributed to the eagerness to return the Wednesday fellowship to its former glory. One of the objective successes was attendance. When we began discussing the church-wide study, *Experiencing God*, and how we could implement it on Wednesday evenings, we initially thought we might have thirty to forty people interested.⁴ It turns out, we had more than one hundred fifty. We knew some of those people might not actually attend, and that we would see some natural attrition, but attendance remained relatively steady throughout the study. We had five assigned groups of no more than twenty-five in each group with a total average attendance over twelve weeks of sixty-eight. That works out to fourteen as an average per group. Some had more, others less, but overall, there was a consistent small discussion group each Wednesday of the study.

⁴ Henry Blackaby, Richard, Blackaby, Mike Blackaby, & Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Brentwood, TN: Lifeway Press, 2022).

The evening was structured first with dinner. As dinner concluded, the supplemental video by Richard and Mike Blackaby was played for the entire gathering. Once the video ended, I usually gave a few announcements, prayed, and dismissed those gathered into their assigned groups. These assignments were intentionally designed to have cross interactions of age, association, and approach, the three generational segments highlighted in the project. Knowing that I needed some feedback on the project, I decided to conduct a Focus Group with a cross section of these same segments of the church. The Focus Group met on December 6, 2023, in the Activity Center of the church and was recorded and transcribed for the purposes of this project and the assessment of the program.⁵ There were ten of us in the meeting and the conversation was transcribed into fifty pages.⁶ There were some noteworthy exchanges, including this one on the value of the substance of the *Experiencing God* study. I was Speaker 1.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. So moving into the actual study of *Experiencing God* by Henry and Richard and Mike Blackaby, did you find this study rewarding, cumbersome, enriching? How would you describe your individual engagement with the study? Now, this is outside of the group. This is you and the book and the Lord. You know, how was your individual time with the study?

SPEAKER 7: Mega enlightening. I mean, I came from not having any sort of understanding -- deeper understanding of religion and you know, Jesus and God, you know, just the outskirts of that. And so I've always associated it to me just kind of sitting on top of the church listening to everyone but actually never going into the church. And so for me, it was very just enlightening, very profound. It made me want to know more. And it made me want to keep going and praying and, you know, look for the signs and things like that.⁷

SPEAKER 2: It was a lot, and it was all very high quality. And it would like, you know, get you to look at the same scripture that you'd looked at multiple times, and the Spirit would lighten it a little bit differently, and then you'd get in a group, and then it was enlightened a little bit differently. And I thought it was really deep. The only -- not criticism I have of it is, you know, the examples were always, like, Moses and, you know, you may get called to bring the exiles out of the -- you know, and it was like what about our -- you know, examples about our daily life? And so think we tried to do that in our groups more, but I mean, that's a reach for criticism. I thought it was a phenomenal study.

⁵ Many thanks to Susan Kittle for her assistance in the recording and transcription of the Focus Group.

⁶ The entire focus group transcription can be found in Appendix B.

⁷ As a side note here, this individual (Speaker 7) and family had been visiting Bethel for several months since I had begun as Bethel's pastor. During this study Speaker 7 had a life-changing, salvation encounter with God. It was inspiring to see God work in this life and many others who went through *Experiencing God*.

SPEAKER 3: I would like to do it again and do it at a time when I truly -- I'm doing three Bible studies right now. That's way too many, but I would like to do it at a time when I had an hour each day, not 20 minutes, not 30 minutes, but a full hour, because I could've gotten so much more out of it. But I cheated too much, you know, I just -- I tried to cram it in, and toward the end of the book, I quit trying to fill in every blank and just take what I could and massage that and not try to fill in the blank.

SPEAKER 1: Do you feel like you grew in your walk with Christ.

SPEAKER 6: Oh, absolutely.

SPEAKER 5: Slightly.

SPEAKER 3: Oh, yeah, but I do think Mark is right in that I thought the examples, and sometimes the vocabulary, was a little too -- heavy is not the word. Too strong. In other words -- I think I wrote it here. Not everything is a crisis. Not everything is major. Not everything is a burden. I mean, those words were used when sometimes I would have used a less strong...

SPEAKER 9: --- in one of the sessions when we were talking about a "crisis," you said you would rather it be called an -- you said ---

SPEAKER 2: Decision?

SPEAKER 8: A dilemma, wasn't it?

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 1: A dilemma. I like that.

SPEAKER 3: And not everything needed to be a major adjustment. Not every -- one of those ones that really got me was they call it the "burden for evangelism." Or the author called it the "burden for evangelism," and gosh, I always thought evangelism was a gift. You -- it was given -- it's a gift that one -- some people have more than others have. So I just thought some of the wording ---

SPEAKER 1: --- instead of burden, maybe passion.

SPEAKER 3: Yes. Something positive, not negative. So that would be a criticism that I had.

Clearly the study had an impact on these individuals. They engaged spiritually and intellectually, enough to push back on Blackaby's terms. There were many people outside of the focus group who expressed their appreciation, unsolicited, for the study and how it helped them grow in their walk with Jesus. All indications point to the success of the study for discipleship, and Bethel has plans to continue with Wednesday Night Together studies for the foreseeable future.

The other primary goal of Wednesday Night Together was intermingling the generations and attempting to group people of different ages, associations, and approaches together for discussion and fellowship. How well did the initiative accomplish the goal of unity between generations? When we began, I did not explicitly define this goal, and I wondered if anyone had noticed the intentional integration of generations. I asked them directly what they thought about their group dynamics:

SPEAKER 1: Well, let's talk about the group, your group experience. Did you find your group and the conversations around your study to be substantive and enriching? And let me -- let me just say -- let's save -- those of you who were group leaders, we'll save your comments for the end. So did you find your discussions substantive and enriching?

SPEAKER 7: I think so, for us. I think one of the things for us, though, was that we were the much, much younger crowd. So our views and thoughts of things were very different from the rest of the group. And so I know from -- like, for our perspective, it would have been nicer to have, like, be in, I guess, a group setting where more people around our age to kind of discuss that kind of stuff. Or even, I guess, you know, if not that, then, you know, every few weeks maybe switch up and put it -- like have different groups and different, you know, things.

SPEAKER 4: I like the idea of maybe switching it up like that. I like that. But I do maybe have, like, a little bit of an opposite view on the demographics of our group. We were with, you know -- we were probably the youngest people in there, but I thought that that was pretty interesting because, you know, growing up in the church but not really having -- really not being at Wednesday night since I was a kid, you know, I felt like I was a little bit on the other side of it this time. And so I felt like I understood a little bit more of what my parents got out of it when I was a kid. I don't know if that makes any sense, but to me it does, because I was like, okay, this is what they were doing when I was there, and this is why it's important.

SPEAKER 1: No, that's good. Well, you know, you guys bring up an issue from Question 10, and since you both brought it up, I want to just go there, and then we'll circle back. But there was an intention. The group makeup was intentional. You were, you know, the youngest people in your group on purpose. You know, we didn't put you in the same demographic categories, and a lot of that was because our Sunday Schools are mostly broken up by demographic. And recognizing that, calling it Wednesday Night Together, how can we integrate our age groups? How can we integrate those folks who have been at Bethel for generations and those who have just arrived, you know? And so the makeup of these groups were to that end. And so then the question is in Number 10 is did you notice -- and you guys obviously noticed that.

SPEAKER 7: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Maybe other people didn't notice that; it wasn't as pronounced to them. And did you find it helpful, not helpful, a nonfactor? You found it helpful?

SPEAKER 7: I would say mostly helpful, but it was kind of those -- it was one of those things where it was like, man, it would be cool to just see how other people's perspective,

like, within our age. But then, at the same time, I always thought, well, it would be really neat if we had, you know, two or three sessions with the same people and then take us and put us, like, in a completely different group and then take us, like, every couple weeks.

SPEAKER 3: I found it really helpful and very interesting to hear the difference in out perceptions by age. But a question that I have, and maybe you have the information or maybe you do not: I wondered if retention or the absenteeism showed a pattern. Were there certain groups that experienced more, or didn't, or experienced less. Or certain ages that quit coming or whatever. If so, I have a thought about that. Is this the proper time?

SPEAKER 1: I haven't analyzed the data, but what is -- what is your thought?

SPEAKER 3: My thought is people my age are -- I'm close to 80 -- I'm getting to the point where I'm not comfortable driving at night. Had it been a rainy fall and there had been rain, I would not have been here every time. As it was, I only missed once, but my point is that there are lots of reasons why people are absent, and they're not all having anything at all to do with how we're teaching, what we're eating, who we're with, or whatever. There are other circumstances that drive our...

SPEAKER 1: Attendance.

SPEAKER 3: Our attendance, yes.

SPEAKER 6: Do you want to add to that?

SPEAKER 5: Well, yeah. We -- one of the biggest blessings that we have is that we landed a mile and a half from the church.

SPEAKER 6: We literally said that on the way over here tonight.

SPEAKER 5: You know, but I can easily see what you're saying. You know, if we were further away, it would be a problem for us. But -- we're just -- we're so lucky.

SPEAKER 3: And until a few years ago, we lived, like you, about a mile and a half away. Now, we live 20 minutes to 30 minutes away. And it -- I dreaded when the Daylight Savings changed our ---

SPEAKER 5: Me too.

SPEAKER 3: Because that became more of a factor. But anyway, that's just one example of why people might -- why attendance might be of interest to study.

SPEAKER 7: There's no excuse for me not to be there because I can walk to my house from here, so... But I mean, you know, the days I wasn't able to make it was either because there was just something going on with kid stuff or because I work at the bank, there's always this movement of things every month end.

SPEAKER 10: One thought I had. I know that rotating the leaders -- I know that that was intentional. But just thinking, though, like in other times when maybe there have been groups or we've been a part of groups on Wednesday nights when the leaders don't rotate, I can see how that can help with, like, you know, "Person Number 5" isn't there or whatever, you know, for three weeks in a row, then there can be, like, a text or a phone call or whatever. Like, hey, missed you. You know what I mean? Whereas, because the

leaders were rotating, you know, we didn't really have that kind of interaction. But it's just a thought.⁸

SPEAKER 1: Any more thoughts on the group conversation or the group generational dynamics? And if you guys (the group leaders) want to chime in at this point too.

SPEAKER 5: I was just going to say that I would have liked for there to have been more discussion. I thought that there were a lot of thought-provoking questions in Blackaby. I would like to have seen -- to have seen more discussion. To me, that's the real value of Bible study is probing deep questions together. I would have liked more of that.

SPEAKER 4: Ironically, I think the first day, it was kind of interesting, because I think it was more of a get to know each other thing, but we went around and talked about what high school we went to. And obviously, people from all over, so they have different experiences and stuff, but it felt like to me -- it kind of turned into, like, a little bit of a -- kind of a comedic side conversation about, you know, what denomination people grew up in and stuff like that, because we were also asked how they got to the church and stuff. And for me personally, I found that really enlightening. It kind of sent me down, like, a little path for a few weeks that I'm still a little bit on that I, kind of, was doing a little bit more research about why the different denominations were the way that they were, what the core of the, you know, disagreements were, kind of, even like things that had influence that we could see today. And I found it really interesting, I think, especially because I grew up in a church in Fuquay-Varina near Raleigh, and it was just called Wake Chapel Christian Church. And so it was technically nondenominational. I realize now it's probably a mix of like Presbyterian, Baptist or something like that. But some of the conversations that we had and were really just kind of jokes amongst other people, kind of set me off into an interest in kind of what that meant, what actually has meaning, what's not just a difference without a real distinction and stuff like that. So, for me, it was like -- it's hard to recommend that solely for that reason, because it wasn't necessarily the purpose of that conversation, but I think that's also kind of what you get as collateral damage in a good way when you introduce people of different generations.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Anybody else on that topic?

SPEAKER 9: The only thing that I had on my comment, too, is I did notice the different ages, but also, like, I would -- stayed with -- I didn't rotate around. But I like having -- and we've heard other people in the church say this, instead of a woman's Bible study and a men's Bible study, but the couple's, a couple study. And this ended up being a time where, you know, because we were together, our -- you know, we talked a lot about conversation that we might not have about different scripture or, "What do you think? How do you -- how does this...?" You know. So I -- we like the couple.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. That's interesting. I wonder how many of you who came with your spouses -- and I think all of you did -- did you have some of these conversations at home?

SPEAKER 7: Every day.

SPEAKER 9: We did too.

⁸ The group leader rotation was developed to help balance the numbers in each individual group and to keep members from choosing the more engaging group leaders over the other volunteers.

SPEAKER 8: We did every day. We took a trip, you know, that was typically the topic of conversation.

SPEAKER 7: My wife loves me even more now.

The conversation about group dynamics seemed to devolve into a conversation about attendance, convenience, and structure. One of the younger people greatly desired to be in an environment with people of the same generation, while one of the older attendees appreciated the generational diversity. It was fascinating to hear that proximity and convenience may have played a greater role in attendance than the group dynamics or the substance of the study itself. That thought by itself strengthens the argument for home Bible studies that are designed as a neighborhood outreach. Finally, I wanted some general feedback on the initiative and if the participants found Wednesday Night Together valuable enough to commit to another one.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. So we'll put that in the category of Question Number 12, but -- of what you would change. But we'll get to there in just a minute. Would you -- here's a question. Would you commit -- and this is not a -- "Are you going to commit?" This is just a -- given what we just experienced with our Wednesday night, would you be interested, would you commit, to another similar churchwide study group?

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 7: Absolutely.

SPEAKER 5: In a heartbeat.

SPEAKER 6: Yes to me as well.

SPEAKER 1: Anybody no?

SPEAKER 2: You know, I'll just add on. I am absolutely a yes. So I mean, we -- when I was on staff previously, right, I did, like, a study of all the folks that were in a Sunday School class or on Wednesday night and what they were doing in the church. And I found that almost all of them were serving in some capacity. Maybe it was elder; maybe it was deacon; maybe it was mission; maybe it was Christian Ed, right? The people that are engaged, largely, are the people that are coming to these kinds of studies. So I think it's so -- it does so much for the health of the church, for fellowship, for so many things. Where we talk about the health of the body in this -- right? I think this is a key. So absolutely.

SPEAKER 1: So in my dissertation, I'm highlighting five areas of discipleship. The first one is worship and then study then fellowship and then service and then outreach. It's those five. And with Wednesday night study, I feel like maybe in "John's" group, worship was a part of it because I think there was some singing involved.

SPEAKER 8: Always.

SPEAKER 1: But the attempt was really to hit fellowship, the study and the service. The service is in that you've got people who are giving their time to lead. You've got people in the kitchen who were cooking. A lot of people helped put up tables and chairs. Everybody just, kind of, pitched in to do things, and so those three areas of our discipleship were the areas we were trying to hit. So to that point -- and you're right. People that are plugged in on things like this on a regular basis are usually the ones that are -- really have bought into the life of the church and bought into growing as a disciple.

SPEAKER 2: Probably 15 years ago, I was not nearly as plugged into the church, and we came to the disciple class that "Jane" taught. It was an intensive class for, I don't know, ten months or whatever. "Jane" taught it. We were there, the "Smith's" were there. There was a whole bunch of people that really got engaged in the church after coming to that class. So I mean, it's a gateway, right?

SPEAKER 1: That's good. Well, any final thoughts? We've gone over an hour, now. So any final thoughts on the study? On the whole evening as a whole as a part of our discipleship process here at Bethel? Like I said, when I say discipleship process, I want to see people engaged in all five of those areas of discipleship. Worship, of course. Worship and then fellowship. We -- we need to have friends. When I say fellowship, I'm just talking about let's eat together. Let's get around a table. Let's go on men's retreats. Let's -- you know, let's do things together. Let's go for a walk together, you know. Let's build friendships. That's really what fellowship is about. Going back to worship, having that personal relationship with Christ, that's the very center of our worship, but then meeting together for worship services and then fellowship. And then study, having a place -- you know, the church providing platforms for people to engage in study together. And then service, having places where we put our hands and feet to the task where we're in the kitchen, or we're working on workdays, or we're serving as a deacon or an elder or a Sunday school teacher or a choir member or all the various ways that we can serve. And then outreach, of course, going outside of the walls of the church under the banner of Christ, not under the banner of Bethel, to say, you know, we're here. We want to bring the good news of the gospel of the kingdom to -- to the world. And so my aim is to see all of our people have -- be growing in all five of those areas. And I think if we all, kind of, took a survey of ourselves, an honest survey, there's some of those where we're really strong. We're here at worship every week, you know, and then, you know, we're -- maybe we've got the fellowship down, and maybe just we'd never go out and outreach. Or maybe we're not serving in some way. Or maybe we're doing all those things, and we're not really involved in a study. So my aim is to see all of our people really add onto that process and grow in those five areas.

SPEAKER 3: I would like to see us be -- develop relationships with other churches. I say this having just recently come to a conclusion that I have missed that in my spiritual experience. I live at the Pines, which is a retirement facility, and I don't like to be too far away from my husband. And so I didn't like coming to Bible studies that were here. A friend invited me to a Bible study at DCPC near me. I went. I've loved it. They've embraced me. I see commonality. I see differences. It's been a positive experience for me, and I think for them too. I'm not the only one there who is not a Bethel [sic] member.

SPEAKER 6: I want to make one observation, if you don't mind. Over the past few years, I've participated or seen several surveys attendance/ membership dropping in the church. What's doing it, why, what to do about it. And consistently, one of the things that they touch on is getting outside of that -- the younger generation, children, grandchildren. They don't restrict it to the one hour on Sunday morning. And it sounds -- it seems to me that Bethel is going in the right direction by trying to not diminish worship, but there's just a different mindset in the younger generation, and they don't -- they may not -- there's

other ways of doing church, I think is the phrase. It strikes me as a healthy church, a church is maybe scratching where a lot of people itch. It certainly has for "Jane" and me.

SPEAKER 10: I was just -- in response to your comment -- it's hard not saying names. Just with -- since we've been here, we've noticed, like, with his pastor covenant group, like, he gets together with so many pastors from different denominations. That's really refreshing to us. And then the Thanksgiving service that it was so many different denominations. I'm just really blessed to see that and to see -- it seems like the Lake Norman area wants to get together and wants to -- like, even just like at the Christmas in Davidson, all the Christmas trees with the nonprofits. I thought that's pretty neat that, like, just the support of nonprofits. And it just seems like there's a built-in outreach in the community.

SPEAKER 3: I agree.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. Anything else? Thank you guys so much for this. I think there's some good material here to work with. Like I said, it's not just for my dissertation. It is part of that, but also for, really -- my dissertation is intended to be a blessing to Bethel, you know, to build up the discipleship. It's our mission. It's what Jesus told us to do: Go make disciples. And as a church, that becomes the center of our purpose. So everything we do should flow out of that purpose.

SPEAKER 10: And I was going to say, and please pray for him as he wraps it up.

The focus group was a tremendous opportunity not only as an evaluation of the Wednesday Night Together initiative, but also for the ministry of Bethel as a whole. I found it immensely rewarding and substantive for future programs. If there was one fundamental lesson learned from the exercise, it was that bringing people together for evaluation offers an opportunity for members of the congregation to feel seen and heard, and for new ideas to spring forth and develop. Overall, I consider Wednesday Night Together a huge success in the goal of discipleship through fellowship, study, and service, as well as the goal of integrating and unifying the generations at Bethel.

Restructuring Leadership

Another point of success came with the restructuring of leadership responsibilities. Organizational flow charts can be boring and cumbersome yet vitally important for efficient management of larger organizations. Bethel needed some clarity in this area of organizational leadership. As a Presbyterian church the primary leadership team consists of elders called by God, elected by the congregation, and ordained and installed by the current Session. At Bethel there are nine elders on the Session. Deacons are covenant partners who have been called by

God, elected by the congregation, and ordained and installed by the session for the purpose of works of service. There are eighteen deacons who serve Bethel.

Ideally at Bethel, each elder would oversee a ministry team of the church and the deacons would complement that team, however, this was not the case when I arrived. In February 2023 there were multiple elders serving on some ministry teams. Some teams hardly ever met together for strategy or planning. Other teams were led by deacons and had no presence or representation on the Session at all. Communication was poor. Ministries operated in silos. The deacons often felt disorganized without clearly articulated responsibilities. Some responsibilities like ushering and greeting devolved into frantic Saturday night emails and Sunday morning phone calls to garner the able bodies for the work. The right hand did not know what the left hand was doing, and frustration was palpable.

As the next revolution of annual leadership approached, I wanted to make some changes. First, I conducted a five-week leadership training module where the incoming leaders read and discussed the book, *Designed to Lead*.⁹ We also discussed our denominational polity, theology, and missional strategy. I felt it was important, no matter to what area of service our officers were called, that we were all on the same page and working together toward the single mission of discipleship. This training was followed by a leadership retreat for all elders, deacons, and staff in early January 2024, that followed the same format of uniting those who serve Bethel with the same goals of seeing people grow in faith.

Second, each of the seven elders who remained on the Session were informed they would be overseers of one ministry team and would be responsible for the function, communication, and initiatives that sprang from that team. The ministry teams at the time were Administration and Personnel, Property, Stewardship and Finance, Worship, Connect, Fellowship, and Serve. The Connect team was named during a marketing exercise and

⁹ Eric Geiger, & Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2016).

essentially worked with Christian education. The Serve team oversaw congregational care and mission.

Since Bethel had seven teams and nine elders, we took advantage of the opportunity for change. Since the name of the Connect Team was somewhat confusing to the congregation, we decided to change it back to Christian Education. Additionally, we separated the Serve Team into two teams. Bethel Care, which serves as the congregational care ministry became its own ministry team, and the Mission Team which serves the outreach for the church became its own team. Finally, we added a Communications Team to support our website, IT, social media, and marketing initiatives. There are now nine teams corresponding to the nine elders who oversee them and they each report to the Session each month.

The deacon ministry also needed renovation. There were no clearly articulated responsibilities for deacons and as a result, when they met monthly there was little to discuss. Those who oversaw ministry teams would bring their ideas to the Diaconate for approval and implementation. They unilaterally decided to host an off-campus fellowship event that was very successful.¹⁰ There was some crossover with the fellowship team since it was led, at the time, by one of the deacons. The bottom line was that there was confusion about the role and responsibility of deacons, and as we approached the season of recruiting new deacons, those issues needed clarification.

We set forth two main deacon responsibilities. First, since there were eighteen, we broke them up into three groups of six. Rather than scrambling to find ushers and greeters for each of the services and for various services during the week, these teams would serve one month at a time as the ushers and greeters. Where previous ushers and greeters would be assigned to either the early service or the later service, these teams would serve for the whole

¹⁰ I cannot express enough how wonderful the “Bethel Barn Bash” event was for the congregation. There was food and games and music and fellowship. It was very well orchestrated. People stepped up to serve, only, it was simply not their responsibility to do so.

morning. There are six on each team and only four are needed on a given Sunday, so within each team there was a rotation, so the members did not serve every week of the month.

Second, each deacon would be assigned to serve on one of the nine ministry teams as a support for the teams. There are also at-large members serving on the teams. There are usually five to six people on a ministry team, and the deacons became dedicated and valued members of these ministries. Ideally, we would assign deacons based on their spiritual gifts and preferences, and in many cases, this works, but there are some who are called upon to serve on teams that are not preferred. Thankfully, the deacons at Bethel are gracious and understanding and have hearts for service no matter the area in which they are called.

The results of these leadership structure adjustments have been remarkable so far. There is now clarity of role and responsibility for both the elders and deacons. Each ministry team has representation at the Session meetings and in this way the planning and communication has become more effective. The responsibility of greeting and ushering at services has not only been streamlined and made efficient, but the deacons have begun to take more ownership in their tasks and are now discussing best practices. There are still several small areas that still need to be tweaked but overall, but I am pleased with the adjustments, and I have heard nothing but good feedback from our leaders.

Points of Needed Growth

It is impossible to make all the changes necessary at a church at one time. Like the garden metaphor, some progress takes time, and some initiatives must begin in future seasons. In this portion of the paper there are four areas of this project that still need more attention to create a more unified and flourishing church; the worship space, Sunday school, outreach communication and mobilization, and the discipleship process itself.

Worship Space and Renovations

Bethel serves the community with two distinct worship services, a modern service led by a praise band, and a traditional service led by a choir. The congregation values these two

expressions, and I am firmly committed to their long-term stability at Bethel. However, the space where these two services meet can, at times, be inconducive to the overall mission of the church. This is a first-world problem, since many churches in other parts of the world would clamor for the space Bethel enjoys, but as a two-hundred-year-old church, it is important for Bethel to consider the needs of the next generation.

There is no front door to Bethel. Yes, the beautiful main sanctuary has a front door, but for the other eighty percent of ministries that happen at Bethel, there is no intuitive or clearly identifiable front door. If you are a guest at the early service, you either must know where you are going, or you have to explore the backside of the building to discover where everyone has parked and where the entrance to the worship service is located.

The modern service meets in a gym. No matter how we dress it up, it is still a gym. The sound is not great, and the seating is difficult to perfect. And because of the equipment needed to project the audio/video portions of the service, along with all the chairs, the room has ceased to function as a gym and has become a full-time worship and fellowship space.

The sanctuary is beautiful, historic, and serves as the worship space for most of the combined services since the gym is used for fellowship meals, but it has several flaws that can be off-putting for our guests. The room is long and narrow and some of the older light fixtures are not only outdated, but they also block the line of sight for the primary video screen. There are no restrooms in the back of the sanctuary. If someone needs to use the restroom, there is one toilet in the building to which you must walk to the front of the room to gain access. There is only one internal entrance to the sanctuary through a narrow set of stairs and it is inconducive to our handicapped guests. A guest in a walker or wheelchair must proceed outside, around the entire building to the only handicap ramp at the front entrance.

Ideally, Bethel might consider renovating the sanctuary, or building an entirely new worship space that better meets the needs of its worship ministry and its desire to reach the next generation. In doing so, they would reclaim the gym for weekly activities and possibly transform the existing sanctuary into a chapel that would be used for preschool, Sunday school,

Wednesday night studies, small memorial services, and weddings. A renovation of this scope is now currently in committee discussion.

Sunday School

The “study” portion of the discipleship process is an essential pillar. Without knowledge of the Scriptures or theology, disciples of Christ will suffer. Bethel does a wonderful job at providing opportunities for Christian education, but one of the goals of this project was unifying a segmented church. While the new Wednesday Night Together program helped the integration of generations, the Sunday School ministry of Bethel is still largely segmented by generational age. The students in those classes love being together. Many of them have been members of their classes for decades. The integration of this area of ministry is a challenge which I decided not to tackle as part of this project. I’m undecided if it will ever be addressed, but if the time comes, it will have to be approached prayerfully with ample communication and buy-in.

One idea is to launch a new season of Sunday school by topic rather than by teacher and room. There are four adult classes and there could be four seasonal classes. One class might study a book or a survey of the Old Testament. Another might do the same with the New Testament. Another class might follow the life and teaching of one of the reformers or the historical revivalists like Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, or John Wesley. Another class might take a deep dive into a theological topic like soteriology or eschatology. The possibilities are immense, and Bethel would benefit greatly from the exercise as I believe people from all ages might be interested in any one of these topics. But the upheaval that would result from this kind of change would need to be calculated, and the strategy and timing would have to be bathed in prayer. This is an initiative for the future.

Mission Communication and Mobilization

Bethel is an incredibly generous church. Twelve percent of all contributions are designated for outreach and mission initiatives. Additionally, Bethel has multiple off-budget

collections that support community organizations and non-profits with a gospel focus, and many other members give individually to support children in other countries who are involved with partner ministries. Clearly, the ability to give is a spiritual gift that the Bible encourages, but the more difficult task is mobilizing people to put their hands and feet to the task.¹¹

The mobilization that does take place tends to happen through other silo ministries like the Presbyterian Women, a Sunday School class, or a small group that wants to collect food or coats for the winter. Rather than going through the team the church has set up to handle the mission and outreach for the church, these groups unilaterally decide to do their own thing. How much more efficient could an outreach initiative become if it went through the proper channels, was well communicated to the congregation, and did not step on another concurrent mission project?

In the past twelve months Bethel has done a sub-par job at communicating to the congregation when and where it sends the twelve percent of its contributions. Some of this deficiency was due to the leadership adjustments that needed to be made. The mission team was one of those ministries that did not have an elder at the helm and as a result, there was no active communication with the Session. As a result, the lack of communication with the Session and with the congregation indicated that missions and outreach as a ministry was not a central value of the church. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Bethel is in the early stages of adjusting the communication of its outreach ministry. Along with the worship ministry team, the mission team is taking time in the worship services to show short videos and promote outreach projects. There are invitations given to join these initiatives. Bethel has not arrived yet with the efficiency for which it hopes, but the problems have been identified and are being addressed.

¹¹ Romans 12:6 & 8, "We have different spiritual gifts... if it is giving, then give generously..."

The Discipleship Process

The final area of needed improvement is the process of discipleship which this project sought to develop. In his book, *A Certain Kind*, Edmund Chan notes that “growth does not come by chance, neither is it haphazard. Believers are effectively equipped for ministry. There is an emphasis on mobilizing each believer for ministry according to his or her gifts.”¹² Developing a process for discipleship that serves every member of the congregation according to their unique spiritual gifts has proved to be a monumental task, and it is far from complete at Bethel.

First, while the areas of discipleship have been communicated to the leadership at the retreat and officer training seminars, they have not been communicated as a process. Additionally, the congregation has heard on numerous occasions that every disciple must integrate the areas of worship, study, fellowship, service, and outreach into their spiritual lives and into their engagement with Bethel, not enough effort was given to help members identify these areas as steps in an intentional process. Further, these areas are not always sequential for every disciple. Some members of the church may be involved in Sunday school but do not attend worship, or they may be involved in mission and outreach but have little interaction with study opportunities. The starting line must be established for each disciple according to where they are in their walk with Jesus Christ.

Second, the process was almost entirely focused on the platforms the church provides for discipleship in these areas and neglected individual engagement. For instance, the area of worship requires an individual relationship with God in surrender and faith relying on the grace each disciple is given through the forgiveness of sin on the cross. In other words, worship as a key element in the life of a disciple means more than attendance at a service. Spiritual disciplines should be encouraged in each disciple’s life for the purpose of developing

¹² Edmund Chan, *A Certain Kind: Intentional Disciplemaking that Redefines Success in Ministry* (Singapore: Covenant Evangelical Free Church, 2013), 56.

worship as an individual practice. The same goes with the other four areas. Disciples must learn to study on their own and fellowship with other believers outside of Bethel, use their gifts in the world and learn to proclaim the gospel at every opportunity without the necessity of a church function. This was communicated in small ways, but not as a point of emphasis.

It was intended early in the project that the process would include a way to easily identify where a disciple was located within the process based on participation in the platforms provided by the church. This proved to be more idealistic than practical. For one, many of Bethel's members did not know, or perhaps would not agree that they were involved in this "superimposed" process on their spiritual lives. There was no infrastructure to identify where on the journey these members were, and thus, no way to track their growth. Further, tracking involvement in church programming is an incomplete, and perhaps an ineffective method in determining spiritual growth in the faith. Much more effort must be given to the engagement of the process of spiritual growth, how one identifies their position in that process, how one advances through the process, and how the leadership of the church tasked with making disciples can determine the spiritual growth of those engaged in the process.

Conclusion

The good news is that Bethel is getting behind the plan and is well on its way to becoming a unified church to do great things in this world. Growth toward unity takes time, but making disciples is becoming the central, unifying mission in the culture of Bethel. Fellowship is easily Bethel's strongest cultural quality. This church loves to be together. Fellowship events, small groups, retreats, friendships, and historical family ties keep this church strong at its core. The other four areas of discipleship ministry are increasing as central areas in the culture of Bethel. In a lake community where people might rather be out on the boat or the golf course on Sunday morning, worship is becoming a priority. More members are engaging with Bible studies and Sunday School. The pool of those willing to serve in areas of leadership is growing. Those willing to serve in less glamorous roles in the church are stepping up with eagerness. The

mission and outreach of the church, while already a robust part of the budget, is becoming a key part of the lives of many members.

Making disciples is still the central mission that I want to develop in the church. I still believe that uniting and prospering a church segmented by generational association, generational age, and generational approach, is possible through an expressed mission of intentional process-discipleship. The focus now moves to developing the discipleship process as something that is engaged intentionally by the congregation with clear steps and markers of growth. The goal, as it always has been, is to grow together into the image of the one who calls us all to follow him, the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.



BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SURVEY REPORT

Generated On: July 5, 2023

Section I: Executive Summary

Section II: Additional Comments



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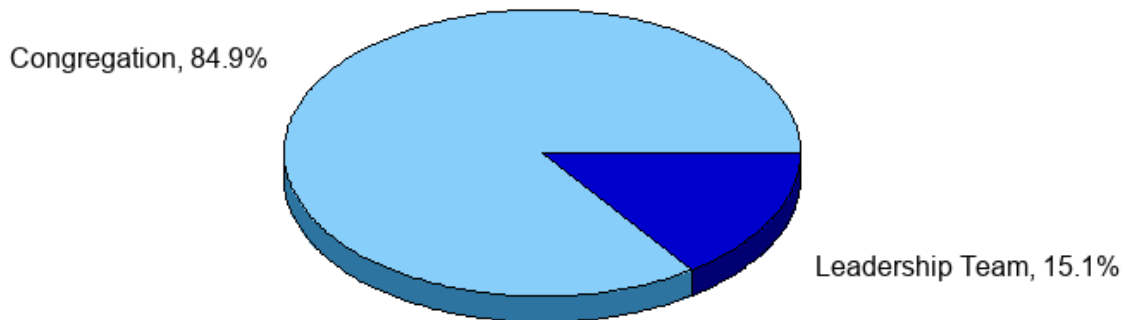
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Section I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

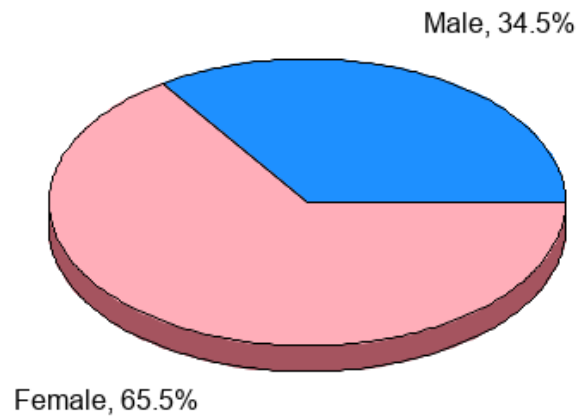
This section will give you a quick overview of the data findings in visual form. Below you'll find graphs of the assessment participants displayed in various categories.

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

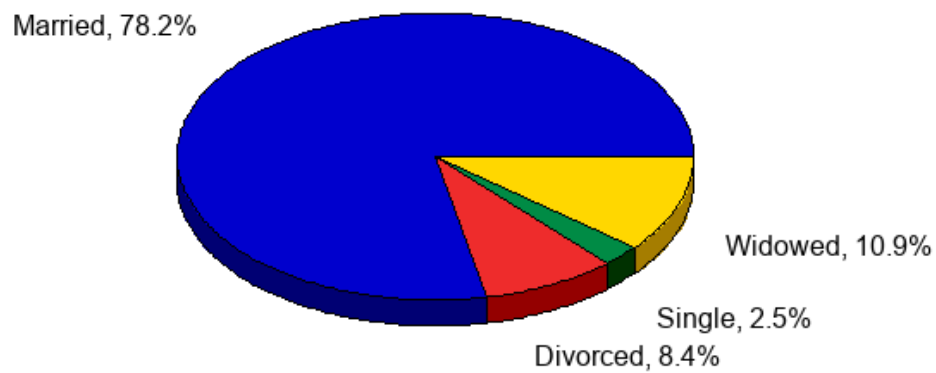
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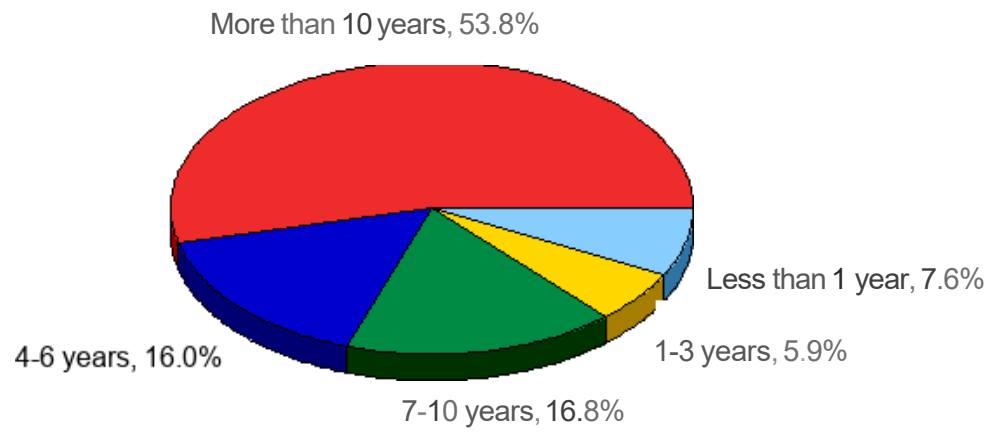
Male/Female

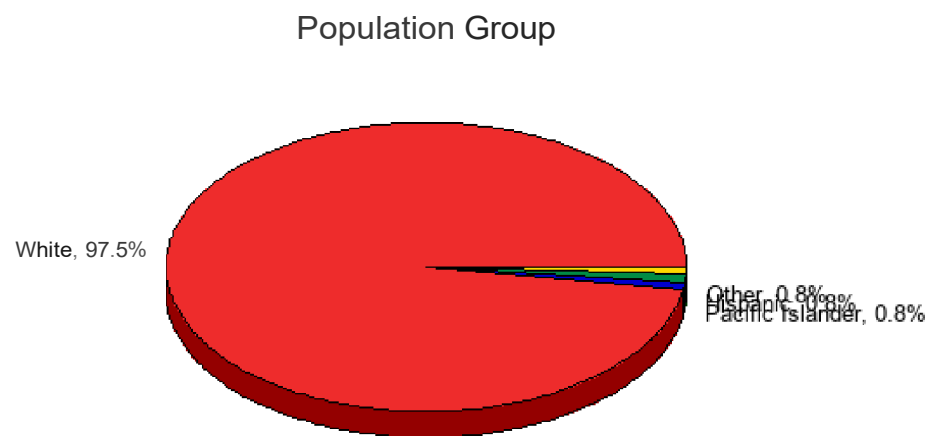
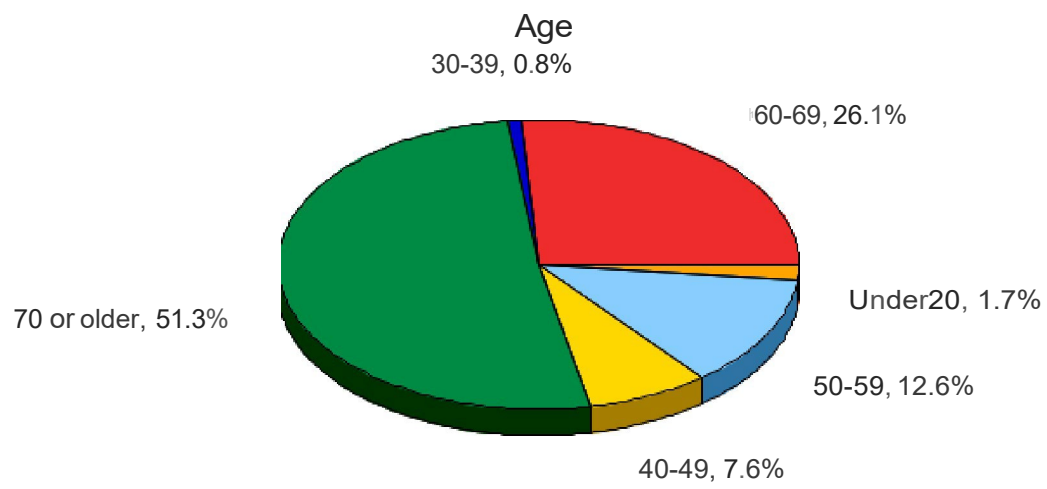


Marital Status

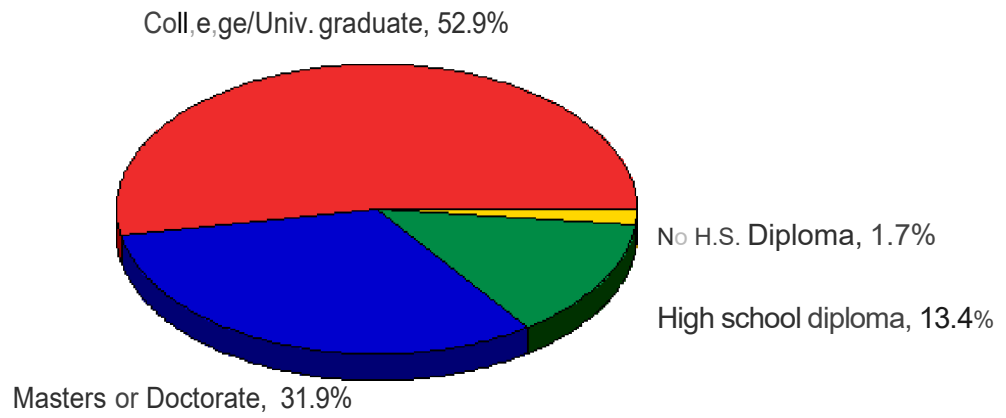


Years at our Church

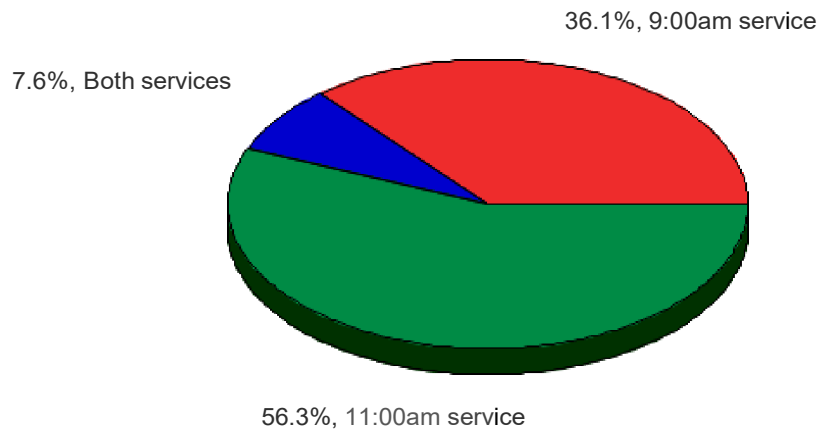




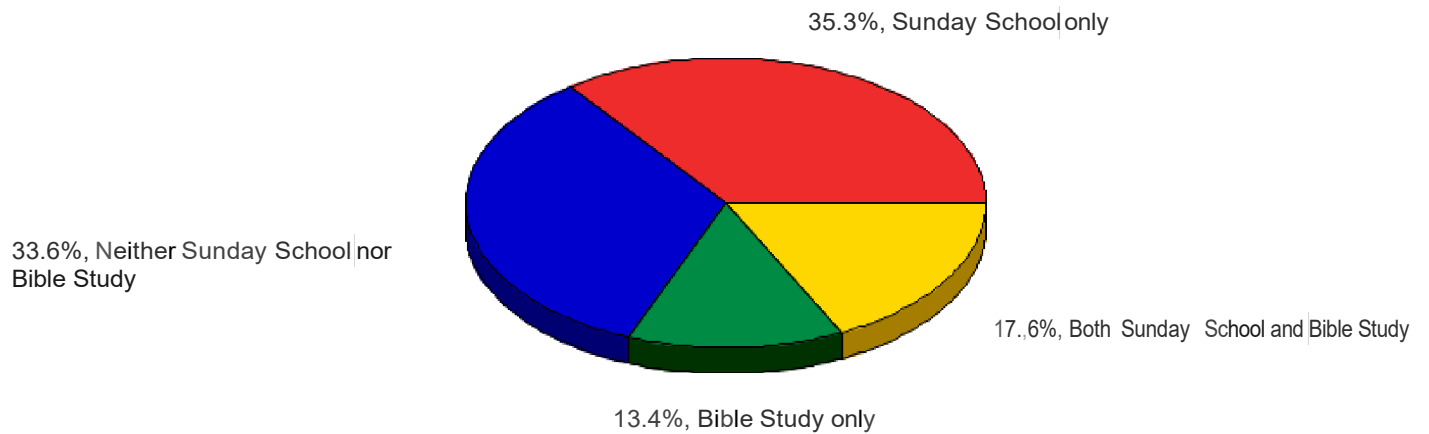
Education



Worship Service Attendance



Christian Education



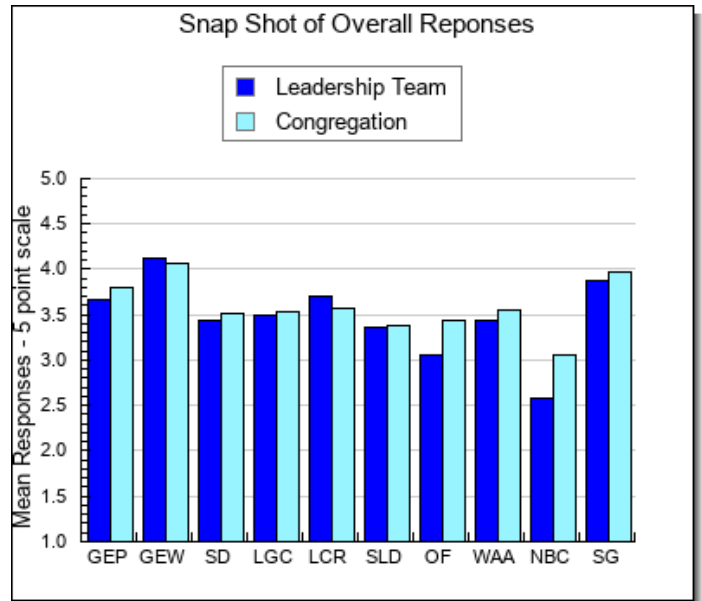
SUMMARY OF THE COLLECTED DATA

Congregation and Leadership Team responses are compared side by side.

The following graph shows the mean responses to the question, "Overall, how effective are we at living out [this characteristic] in our church?" which was asked at the end of each characteristic section.

The 10 Characteristics

1. **GEP**-God's Empowering Presence
2. **GEW**-God-Exalting Worship
3. **SD**-Spiritual Disciplines
4. **LGC**-Learning & Growing in the Community
5. **LCR**-Loving & Caring Relationships
6. **SLD**-Servant-Leadership Development
7. **OF**-An Outward Focus
8. **WAA**-Wise Administration & Accountability
9. **NBC**-Networking with the Body of Christ
10. **SG**-Stewardship & Generosity

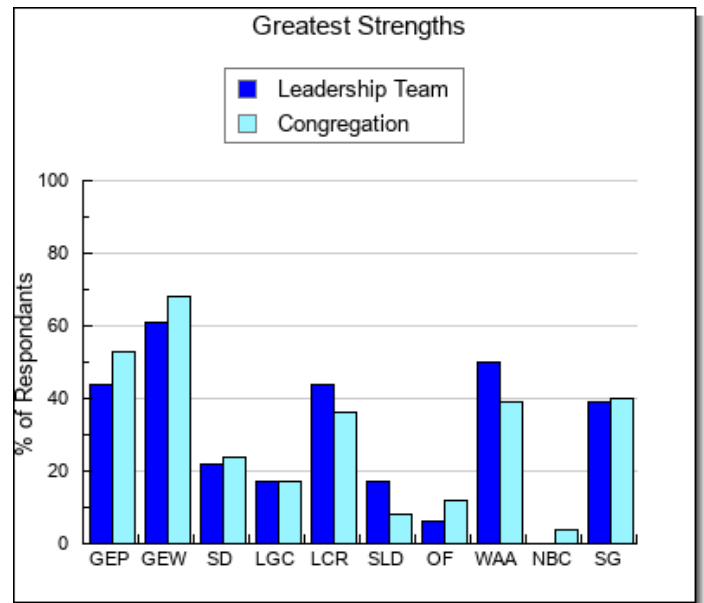


GREATEST STRENGTHS OF OUR CHURCH

Keep in mind that each participant was asked to choose *three* characteristics. The following graph shows that for each characteristic, X% of the respondents chose that trait as one of their top three selections.

The 10 Characteristics

1. **GEP**-God's Empowering Presence
2. **GEW**-God-Exalting Worship
3. **SD**-Spiritual Disciplines
4. **LGC**-Learning & Growing in the Community
5. **LCR**-Loving & Caring Relationships
6. **SLD**-Servant-Leadership Development
7. **OF**-An Outward Focus
8. **WAA**-Wise Administration & Accountability
9. **NBC**-Networking with the Body of Christ
10. **SG**-Stewardship & Generosity



Note: Pay careful attention to areas where there was a stark discrepancy between what the Congregation said and what the Leadership Team said. Discuss why you think this discrepancy exists.

The Congregation identified your church's strongest characteristics as follows (more than one trait indicates a tie in percentage response):

68% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

God-Exalting Worship Typically, when your congregation affirms "God Exalting Worship" as one of your greatest strengths, they are celebrating the fact that the experience of gathering together for worship as the people of God is refreshing and renewing, uplifting and meaningful (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). Worship is a value that your congregation encourages you to consider a high priority on a weekly basis and generally appreciates the ways in which they are ushered into the presence of God. When worship is a strength, it's important to keep building on this so the people are fed by the Word of God, nurtured by prayer, and encouraged to engage the world as instruments of God's mercy, wisdom, and strength.

53% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

God's Empowering Presence Typically, when your congregation affirms "God's Empowering Presence" as one of your greatest strengths, they are sensing that the church actively seeks the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit for its daily life and ministry (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). Is there an obvious presence of God's abiding peace when you gather for worship, fellowship, and/or service to others? God's empowering presence is a fresh reminder that the people of God need to depend solely on the Spirit for every decision made, every relationship pursued, and every action lived out in His name and for His sake.

40% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

Stewardship & Generosity Typically, when your congregation affirms "Stewardship and Generosity" as one of your greatest strengths, they are thrilled with the ways in which the budget is raised, the resources are stewarded, and the generosity of the church is expanded (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). It is through this trait of a healthy church that you will see evidence of "where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The local church that stewards the abundant love of Christ in tangible ways will experience the joy of seeing how personal and financial gifts are multiplied for the glory of God. The more this trait is taken seriously by the congregation, the more inclined will be their hearts toward the needs of the church, the community, and toward others who live in much less fortunate environments.

Out of all 70 questions, the Congregation gave the following specific questions their highest marks (more than one question indicates a tie in mean response):

1. **Mean Score: 4.65 out of 5**

When we gather to worship together, how well do we as a church emphasize biblical and relevant preaching? (GEW)

2. **Mean Score: 4.61 out of 5**

When we gather to worship together, how well are we as a church invited to listen attentively to the reading of Scripture? (GEW)

3. **Mean Score: 4.55 out of 5**

From your perspective, how well does our church operate with financial integrity and accountability? (SG)

The Leadership Team identified your church's strongest characteristics as follows (more than one trait indicates a tie in percentage response)

61% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

God-Exalting Worship Typically, when your leadership team affirms "God Exalting Worship" as one of your greatest strengths, they are celebrating together the ways in which the weekly gathering of God's people is edifying, enriching, and renewing for all who attend (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). In this trait of a healthy church, the public worship experiences are held in high regard as the place where the church comes together to dedicate their lives to fulfilling believers' primary reason for being. As a result, each worship service is designed to create the space for the ministry of God's Spirit to be evidenced through the music, praying, Scripture reading, preaching, giving, sharing, baptism, communion, etc. - all for the glory of God.

50% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

Wise Administration & Accountability Typically, when your leadership team affirms "Wise Administration and Accountability" as one of your greatest strengths, there is a utilization of appropriate facilities, equipment, and systems to maximize support for the growth and development of the church's ongoing ministry (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). In this regard, they foster accountable ways of administering the programs of the church that leads to excellence, effectiveness, and efficiency in the day-to-day nature of ministry. To enhance this strength, leaders must consider ways to evaluate progress in line with the stated mission and vision of the church and pray, think, and plan strategically (under the guidance of God's Spirit) for the future.

44% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three strengths of our church."

God's Empowering Presence Typically, when your leadership team affirms "God's Empowering Presence" as one of your greatest strengths, they are noting the many ways in which the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit is sustaining your shared worship, fellowship, and witness (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). When leaders see the work of the Spirit alive in the local church, they are recognizing the gifts of the Spirit among the people as evidenced through the fruit of the Spirit. Leaders who understand the need to totally depend upon God for their relationships, deliberations, and decision-making will serve well the needs of the congregation and the extension of ministry will flow generously into the community and world.

A Commitment to Loving & Caring Relationships Typically, when your leadership team affirms "Commitment to Loving, Caring Relationships" as one of your greatest strengths, they recognize the effective ways in which the church pursues a God-honoring quality of life together (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is affirmed). When this trait is considered a strength within the fellowship of believers, there are concerted efforts to communicate with one another in ways that edify, resolve conflicts in a manner befitting Christ, and deepen relationships through joyful experiences of worship, love and service. When authenticity is modeled and affirmed, caring for one another will include forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and the bearing of each other's burdens. What a joy to behold!

Out of all 70 questions, the Leadership Team gave the following specific questions their highest marks (more than one question indicates a tie in mean response):

1. **Mean Score: 4.76 out of 5**

From your perspective, how well does our church operate with financial integrity and accountability? (SG)

2. **Mean Score: 4.65 out of 5**

When we gather to worship together, how well are we as a church invited to engage in singing songs and/or hymns that praise God and encourage us as believers? (GEW)

3. **Mean Score: 4.61 out of 5**

When we gather to worship together, how well are we as a church invited to listen attentively to the reading of Scripture? (GEW)

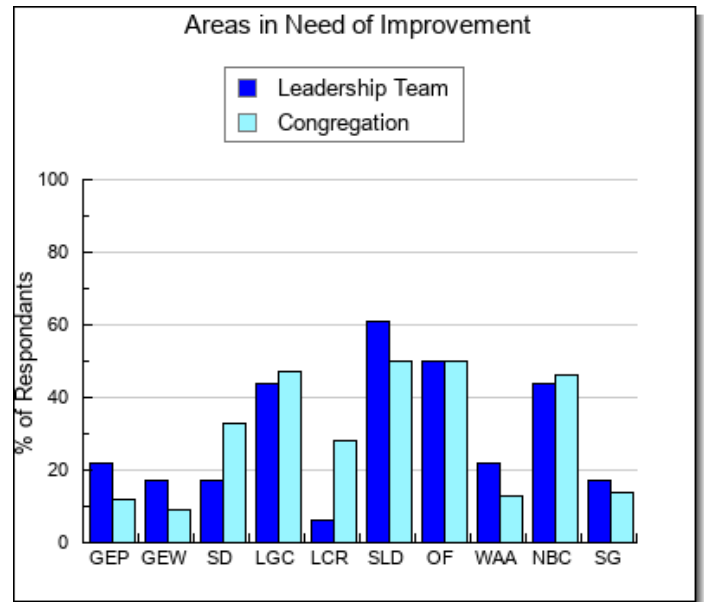
When we gather to worship together, how well do we as a church emphasize biblical and relevant preaching? (GEW)

AREAS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT FOR OUR CHURCH

Keep in mind that each participant was asked to choose *three* characteristics. The following graph shows that for each characteristic, X% of the respondents chose that trait as one of their top three selections

The 10 Characteristics

1. **GEP**-God's Empowering Presence
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10. **SG**-Stewardship & Generosity



Note: Pay careful attention to areas where there was a stark discrepancy between what the Congregation said and what the Leadership Team said. Discuss why you think this discrepancy exists.

The Congregation identified the characteristics most in need of improvement as follows (more than one trait indicates a tie in percentage response):

50% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

Servant-Leadership Development Generally, when your congregation identifies "Servant Leadership Development" as a trait in need of improvement, the concern being voiced is focused on the lack of identifying, training and empowering members for service within and outside the local church (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). When regular attendees share this anxiety about their church, the message is directed primarily toward their leaders. Is there a plan in place for "equipping the saints for the work of ministry?" If so, then be sure to communicate that to the membership; if not, then make it a priority to establish ways in which this can be addressed. Help people identify their gift mix, share opportunities for utilizing their gifts in ministry, provide training and resources, and send them out to serve others with your blessing.

An Outward Focus Generally, when your congregation identifies "Outward Focus" as a trait in need of improvement, they are expressing collectively their concern about the local church's lack of outreach (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). This may include reaching out evangelistically to unchurched neighbors, serving the tangible needs of people in impoverished communities, practicing hospitality to internationals living in our country, and/or supporting missionaries in other parts of the world. When this trait of a healthy church is lacking in your faith community, there are many ways to transform your shared mission toward strategic initiatives of outreach. Capture the best ideas among your members and mobilize as many as possible to engage in the Great Commission of "going and making disciples of every nation" for the sake of building up the kingdom of God.

47% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

Learning & Growing in Community Generally, when your congregation identifies "Learning and Growing in Community" as a trait in need of improvement, the people are sharing their collective concern about the lack of community-building opportunities within the church (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). In addition, there may in fact be concern about the existing "group" experiences that the church offers, which may not be meeting the expectations of your members and attendees. Concentrating creative efforts toward the enhancement of community life will lead to meaningful growth within the context of safe, affirming environments. The word "community" will require special focus, resulting in a deeper walk of faith side-by-side as the family of God.

46% of the Congregation chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

Networking with the Body of Christ Generally, when your congregation identifies "Networking with the Body of Christ" as a trait in need of

improvement, they are voicing their fears about becoming exclusive and distant from the wider community of believers (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). They do not want the church to become watered down in your shared convictions about "unity" among other congregations. Instead, they are desirous of connecting with others of like mind and heart in places where Christ-centered worship, community service opportunities, church facilities and training events can all be shared in a spirit of cooperation and collective witness. Congregations with a "kingdom" mentality are richly blessed as they combine their efforts and resources for building up the body of Christ with others who share our faith commitment in Christ.

Out of all 70 questions, the Congregation gave the following specific questions their lowest marks (more than one question indicates a tie in mean response):

1. Mean Score: 2.46 out of 5

How well does our church serve as a place for supporting the needs of single adults? (LCR)

2. Mean Score: 2.52 out of 5

How often does our church join area-wide celebrations where Christians from other churches worship God together? (NBC)

3. Mean Score: 2.78 out of 5

How well does our church train and equip our members to effectively present the gospel to those outside the Christian faith? (OF)

The Leadership Team identified the characteristics most in need of improvement as follows (more than one trait indicates a tie in percentage response):

61% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

Servant-Leadership Development Generally, when your leadership team identifies "Servant Leadership Development" as a trait in need of improvement, there is a recognition that too few people are handling too much responsibility (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). If this is true, this will allow you the opportunity to begin fresh initiatives that will assist members in discovering their God-given gifts, provide places to utilize their gifts, train in the development of gifts, and commission members to serve God in a vast array of ministry arenas within and outside the local church. Creating an environment of servant leadership will empower and assimilate many in the active ministry of the local church.

50% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

An Outward Focus Generally, when your leadership team identifies "Outward Focus" as a trait in need of improvement, the concern is for ministries such as evangelism, social action, international missions, and the care for the poor and impoverished (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). If this trait is indeed a shortcoming, immediate attention must be given for establishing renewed church-wide priorities of outreach. It is here that the church communicates the truth of Jesus and demonstrates the love of Jesus to those outside the faith. Building up the Kingdom of God and expanding the work of the Church is an essential ingredient of ministry vitality. This trait is especially close to the heart of God and should be a top priority for His Church as well. Innovative, effective, and meaningful ministry in Jesus' name needs to come out of a fresh strategy for sharing the Gospel with those within our reach, in urban/rural settings, and around the globe.

44% of the Leadership Team chose the following trait(s) as one of their "top three areas in need of improvement."

Learning & Growing in Community Generally, when your leadership team identifies "Learning and Growing in Community" as a trait in need of improvement, they are identifying their concern about the lack of community-building efforts expended in the life of the church (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). These efforts encourage believers to grow in their walks with God and one another and include ministries such as small groups, individual mentoring, Sunday school, and specialized learning opportunities. Taking the time to review your current offerings in light of the need to deepen your community may in fact lead to the letting go of existing ministries in order to make room for more effective ones. Bottom line is to provide safe, affirming environments conducive to the spiritual growth of all ages under your care.

Networking with the Body of Christ Generally, when your leadership team identifies "Networking with the Body of Christ" as a trait in need of improvement, there is concern about how minimal is the contact of the local church with the wider body of Christ (consult your detailed findings for specific ways in which this trait is highlighted). When churches are connecting in a healthy way with other like-minded local churches, there is collaboration, sharing of resources and learning opportunities, as well as united celebrations of worship. Evidence of unity among like-minded churches will also include pastors from various churches who enjoy being together for prayer, friendship, and iron-sharpening-iron spiritual growth. Leaders acknowledge that this is not a watering down of theological conviction, nor is it acquiescing to liberal ecumenism, but instead an opportunity to be strengthened by the unity expressed in Jesus' prayer for His Church in John 17.

Out of all 70 questions, the Leadership Team gave the following specific questions their lowest marks (more than

one question indicates a tie in mean response):

1. **Mean Score: 2.18 out of 5**

How often does our church join area-wide celebrations where Christians from other churches worship God together? (NBC)

2. **Mean Score: 2.19 out of 5**

How well does our church serve as a place for supporting the needs of single adults? (LCR)

3. **Mean Score: 2.29 out of 5**

How well does our church encourage and equip its members to practice reflection (such as journaling, prayerfully reviewing the day's events, etc.)? (SD)

Section II: ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

God's Empowering Presence

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #1(Congregation)

- I have seen this in the last few months. Before that, with many different pastors, it was not shown as much.
- some of these are hard to answer for the WHOLE membership, so my answers apply more to thje active/committed members.
- My comments are not intended to be unnaturally negative, but rather to note spaces for us to grow. We are 'comfortable' through any number of measurable metrics which is not good for ongoing organizational health nor the call of Christ.
- We are going through a growing season. I look forward to watching us move closer to God's empowering presence.
- I'm not sure how knowledgeable I am as an individual with a limited view to provide consideration of "as a church," but I did my best.
- I feel our church in the past has done a wonderful job at living out and showing God's presences in our church/daily lives. That feeling was somewhat "put on hold" for the past few years but I think things are moving forward in the right direction.
- I have been very impressed with the love and support from the covenant partners. I'm new to the church and one of the reasons I joined was because of the church encouraging and reminding us to always know God is in charge.
- Often the focus is serving a tactical need vs. prayerfully making a decision.
- I believe that this church encourages a God centered life - that a strong relationship with Him is key to experiencing His presence in our lives.
- I don't know how individual Bethel members try to live out God's presence. I do not mean this comment to be an indictment of any member; only that I do not know what lies in the other members' hearts.
- I think our church has the potential to do all these things previously asked under the right LEADERSHIP - We are recovering from disruptions due to Covid and the pastor that served after Bill Cain - I think we need to connect via small groups and more programs that allow connection and opportunities to serve in the community
- I believe that we all fall short in this area, we forget that it's not all about us. • I feel like I fall short. We all fall short but we can't stop trying to improve

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #1(Leadership Team)

- I sense we are slowly moving away from "that is not how it has been done at Bethel". We need to continue. • I'm not sure we can easily assess an "overall" rating, since this is often event/group specific.
- I think this is our vision but I would like to see, hear, and feel more encouragement in this area.

God-Exalting Worship

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #2(Congregation)

- Would love to see a more vibrant choir. Those involved today are freely giving to our service and are appreciated. Growing that portion of our service would be wonderful
- This is improving but can we ever really be a "5" when it comes to the genuine worship of GOD?
- Our God-centric shared worship experiences are one of our strengths at BPC. There has been and continues to be emphasis on the importance of Scripture and it's relevance to our daily lives.
- I would encourage more blended services. If the screen could have darker wording the older folks could read it better. The same kind of help for the older folks in the audio equipment would help. If there is a clear voice option it would help the seniors.
- The preaching at Bethel has been consistently excellent and biblical. Participatory worship has not. The congregation in both services needs to be more engaged in praise and prayer
- I attend the 9:00 service and feel that the music sets the tone for worship and wraps us the service very well. It comes across cohesively.
- There are many things that we make assumptions about and don't take the time to formatively assess. There is an assumption that everyone has strong biblical knowledge, knows how to pray out loud, etc. We need to figure out where people are and then provide supports to help the, grow. I think we could do a much better job at teaching how to pray....we expect our congregation to know how to pray and how to worship. There is nothing worse than being in a situation where you don't feel comfortable praying out loud and someone calls on people randomly in the group to lead prayer and you worry the whole time that you are going to be called upon because you are uncomfortable with praying in front of others, rather than getting to focus on the lesson.
- The only thing I feel that is lacking in fully exalting God in our services is the leadership of our choir. The choir has great potential that we have seen in the past. I am not sure if they are getting the correct guidance.
- I feel each person must accept personal responsibility to make every effort in living out our God exalting worship
- We should all be worshipping together based on our size and numbers, however, because of preferences of a few, we are separated into two services. This has cut down on fellowship time between Sunday School and Worship Service. It honestly feels like we are two churches. We rarely combine the services or have fellowship together. To me, the music doesn't matter. I have a preference but I would rather see us all together and I would never leave the church over the music style. To me, a focus on personal music preference is a selfish way of thinking and should be addressed. If we all quit thinking about what we personally like and think about filling the church up with people that need to be reached, this would be pleasing to our God.
- The 11 o'clock service is better for getting the message of god through using hymns along with scripture and sermon.
- I think that we strive to live out God-Exalting worship within our Church. I am not sure that we are putting forth the same effort in our local community at this time.
- Exalting, verbally praising God IN worship, evangelizing is NOT me. If you say amen, if I agree, I'll say AMEN. However, I will actively contribute

in SS and Bible study and share witness more one on one with parishioners, friends and neighbors. My 'exaltation' is inferred and quietly demonstrated through my stained glass craft of angels and greeting cards to the community (incl church) and Hospice KidsPath through a unique gift of love.

- The 9am music needs improvement - I applaud those that are serving but the leadership is weak - if the leader of this group who is an employee did a better job at communicating and reaching out to the members I think others would participate - I have heard and know first hand how this is not happening and it shows - Music is a critical part of worship and it can help make or break the effectiveness of the worship experience.

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #2(Leadership Team)

- In the early service, very few, sometimes no one, is encouraged to give. If people in this service aren't encouraged to give in a traditional sense (passing a basket) perhaps we could encourage giving in another way - "use this time to give via your phone" or "scan the QR code" or even, "think about how you will give of your time in the week ahead"
- I think this is a strength of our church. I am always inspired and fulfilled by our Worship.

Spiritual Disciplines

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #3(Congregation)

- As a choir member I do not have access to Sunday school.
- For several years, there was complete silence on subjects such as Pentecost Sunday and mention of the Reformation. In its place was an emphasis on "new perspectives on Paul" that actively downplayed the Doctrines of the Reformation. Our people were generally not aware that the messages from the pulpit were tending toward a shallow theology. As H.R. Niebuhr said about liberalism: they proclaim and "worship a God without wrath who brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross".
- We have space to grow here, but it requires a significant and ongoing commitment from our lay leaders. That is a great challenge for us on multiple levels: finding those called to lead and then called to lead in these ways.
- I hope we add more Life application and even a purpose driven prayer life to our future studies • See responses in last section.
- Our church offers many opportunities to grow in our spiritual disciplines
- I think that our Church can do more in this area. A weeknight program, i.e. Wednesday evening, could be very effective in helping all of us to strengthen ourselves in this area.
- I had to look up the definition. You need to teach a separate class on a lot of these subjects, just to bring lay folk up to speed. Not everyone is Buddy Morrow- ha!
- I wish the church would offer some bible studies or programs that are not during the day - A lot of us work and there are no programs in the evenings - I agree they would need to be seasonal type programs or 6 week opportunities - We need more retreats or special occasions that create fellowship - I have a lot of these disciplines in my own life but they originated from past programs that are no longer offered at the church and I think it would be hard for younger people to join in based on the current offerings.

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #3(Leadership Team)

- Our main time of Bible study is Sunday morning, which is often begun late or cut off early due to Worship services being before and after. Lifegroups seem to be more about fellowship than Bible study. An offering outside of Sunday mornings, such as the Wednesday Night Ignite program we had in the past, would be a great addition.
- Bethel's attendance for anything outside of Sunday morning service has declined, and it's in Sunday School or other sessions that these types of skills would be learned and practiced.
- I would love for there to be more opportunities for bible study. I engage in women's bible studies when possible over the last couple of years. But, I would love the opportunity to engage in bible study for husbands, wives, and/or family. I know there was a successful marriage bible study in the past I think these opportunities should continue.

Learning & Growing in Community

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #4(Congregation)

- Miss the BBQ fundraiser. Great time together and funds for good causes. Some moving away from local mission opportunities as a church, individuals have continued to reach out to others in the community. Use of Bethel House for Room in the Inn for the community and many other opportunities. Peace be with you as we all are his children and need each other.
 - Bethel needs a DCE again
 - I like my Sunday School class.
 - We have great classes and strong leaders for our Sunday School classes and in our youth programs. For the other questions....we do a lot of talking about these things....talking "at" people but we lack any meaningful action. A leader can tell a group to think about their spiritual gifts, for example, but until someone actually meets with you, identifies those with you, sets a plan for how you can use those, and there is some level of accountability, this remains a great Sunday lesson that never makes it into practice. We need to move beyond words and talking at people and shift towards working with people to establish goals for growth, change, impact, etc.
 - We have opportunities, but they are relatively cumbersome for new attendees/members to join. We are ready for a refresh of approach and ideas.
 - SS has always been an important part of Bethel. It would be nice to have new and different opportunities to learn in different ways.
 - Bethel says they want younger members but do not offer evening bible studies or events. It's harder for those of us that work during the day. We need to bring back Wednesday night dinner for families to engage youth and working parents.
 - Not aware of much being done in this area; but, it may be ongoing without my knowledge
 - We are involved as much as we can, at our age, health, and distance from Cornelius. I think the church actively engages to its capacity in the community.
 - Two services tends to dilute fellowship, learning and growing together as one congregation. Would like to see more together worship and fellowship experiences
 - Lots of opportunities for improvement here - I know everyone says Wednesday night programs are a thing of the past but I promise you that is where a lot of the strong relationships that still exist at the church formed and children love them- the key is to provide a meal - that brings out the young parents who don't want to cook - and then provide something for their children - then the adults will attend the programs too
 - We need more Life Groups and to encourage small group interaction.
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #4(Leadership Team)
- Bethel has opportunities available, but lacks the follow through to get people there.
 - More opportunities in this area are needed! I like the idea of Wednesday night opportunities.

A Commitment to Loving & Caring Relationships

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #5(Congregation)

- Some of these questions were a little difficult for me to answer since we are relatively new to the church.
 - Caring and nurturing relationships do flourish within the fellowship of Bible studies. Beyond this aspect of church life, most of us remain de facto strangers.
 - Beth Moss and Bethel Cares are big plus as well as caregiving and prayer within our various affinity groups and classes. The stained glass angels, angels from the women, and card ministry are all important as well as deacon visits to homebound if that is still being done.
 - We need to bring all the church together socially more often. Thanks for the Barn Bash
 - This is definitely one of Bethel's stronger areas, especially for those who are having family and health crises.
 - We have met some amazing people in our church and absolutely believe that loving and caring relationships is the best part of the Bethel community.
 - I feel that as a whole we as a church do genuinely love and care about each other. I wish the "prayer request" option was still available on our website. There used to be many more opportunities to lift prayers and praise for our fellow members but now I think most don't realize what they need to do to submit a prayer/praise request.
 - We have a non-threatening environment for this kind of growth internally, but not much of a mechanism to share that with others outside of the BPC body of faith. We have some opportunity to grow here, with an implied need for strong leadership to make that happen ---
 - I think there are avenues to improve in the areas questioned in this section. Perhaps more life groups for singles. We do participate in support for homeless but need to find ways to reach more diverse populations.
 - I am an Elder. I have seen the worst conflict here including on the Session, with former pastors, between Elders and between covenant partners and staff. I can only say that the devil gets worried when we are about to become successful and he prowls around looking for opportunities to divide us. Thankfully, Bethel is God's church and he is in control and we continue to carry on with strength from Him. We need strong leadership to set the tone for where we are headed and if we can agree on a direction there will be no stopping us. It's the same as in politics, what we agree on is so much more than what we disagree on but yet, we let the disagreements hold us back. We need to be reminded of this constantly. I do find that Bethel responds very well to preaching that comes from the pulpit. If we find ways to show ourselves what God wants us to do from the Bible, people will get on board. For example: we suffer from lack of diversity and we have some bigots in our midst but we don't address it, even though we are all God's children.
 - Bethel has a fair number of widows/widowers. Many of these, mostly ladies, have physical disabilities. Most, including myself, rarely hear from a church family that we spent years ministering to others, praying, visiting, taking meals. Recently, one of the oldest members at Bethel said to me "I have tithed and been faithful to Bethel for over 40 years, yet I now live alone and have a broken arm, and not one person has brought a meal to me. Is Bethel not doing that anymore?" Sadly, I replied "I guess not." The scriptures clearly state that we are to care for the widows. Bethel needs to step up here.
 - We have some programs that attempt to meet this objective within the Church. We can definitely improve our initiatives in the community around Bethel.
 - We need more marriage classes to support and strengthen existing bonds.
 - I think more Life Groups would help to create loving and caring relationships
 - In this area, we have varied greatly over the years from the years of great conflict to the years of healing
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #5(Leadership Team)
- A huge opportunity exists at Bethel in terms of growing relationships with our preschool families.
 - Bethel is excellent with its older population and long-time members. Bethel is good with one-off situations that are outside the norm. Bethel could improve its outreach to the community.
- Servant-Leadership Development
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #6(Congregation)
- There is a coterie of members of long standing which tend to cycle through the most important leadership positions. Sometimes, the persons on the nominating committees return to those who have served in the past simply because they don't really know the newer people.
 - We have some opportunity to grow here as well - we haven't utilized an intentional process in the past to identify/nurture/implement leadership at BPC. That said, we are not entirely bereft of leaders in certain areas. However, we can do better by being more intentional ---
 - I think Cares does a remarkable service to members in need of support. Women's groups offer many opportunities to serve.
 - So my answer would be different if we hadn't just come through Covid. During that time it was literally impossible to recruit new leaders. This led to the old leaders staying on board past their normal terms. This led to burn out. It was also criticized by the congregation.
- Honestly, it is very difficult to recruit leaders. We can usually find Elders but we had to decrease the size of our deacon class because of lack of interest. Please talk to the nominating committee to learn how difficult it is to find leaders. I believe people would give the feedback that they don't want to be leaders because it gives a view to a side of the church people want to ignore. A lot of people who attend want to be a "taker" and not a giver. Even though it is expected for covenant partners to participate and serve, many either cannot or do not. It's always the same core group of people who do all the work.
- Bethel needs to encourage more people to lead and not have the same people always volunteering.
 - Narrow leadership now much use of volunteers. Attitude is easier to church staff and officers to do things rather than going through the required effort to recruit, train and supervise volunteers.
 - I see no effort in this area, on the part of Bethel, at all.
 - I feel there is a huge division with the two services. Being involved with the women's group, there is seldom interaction with females younger than 60.
 - I know in the past the same people are the ones doing all the work - I don't think that is unique to Bethel - it is just the way it is - I think people need to be asked to help - it is hard for some people to just volunteer -
 - If more people were involved in Life Groups I think it would help develop servant leaders
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #6(Leadership Team)
- We have a lot of incredible servants at Bethel! Unfortunately it's a situation where 20% of the same people do 80% of the work. Some volunteers have been in their roles on committees for far too long. This is not good for the volunteer or for the church. We need to encourage new volunteers while encouraging others to step aside, allow for new leadership and be open to changes they may bring. Lastly, by spending time volunteering in our communities (ie outside of Bethel) we may have an even greater impact for the kingdom - we should encourage each other in this way.
 - Bethel has a good bench of servant-leaders willing and able to whatever is needed. Unfortunately, that bench is the same people across the board and Bethel has far more Sunday morning consumers than servant-leaders.
- An Outward Focus
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #7(Congregation)
- Not many people living on Bethel Church rd attend Bethel Church

- I independently support para-church ministries such as Crossway and Legonier (Bibles and study materials to third-world countries) and humanitarian relief efforts such as Samaritan's Purse. This is not a direct ministry within Bethel Church.
 - Bethel does much behind the scenes that could better be communicated. In the old PCUSA, the required annual report to the congregation gave an excellent summary of where all the mission endeavors and funds were deployed in the past year. A mission summary in the newsletter helped too as well as minutes for mission, videos, and denominational offerings.
 - Bethel is quick to help in crisis through material gifts. Sharing the Gospel with those beyond our walls is not their highest priority
 - I do worry about the next generation. As a church with a lot of internal generational connections, I'm not sure how well we are addressing that. I do think Sean is doing a great job with the youth.
 - I believe that our youth leaders are doing a great job! I am worried a bit about the future of our youth in the community and would like to see us reach many many more children and teens than we currently are reaching. Overall, I think our congregation gets really excited about projects like Haiti but does not seem to put this same type of enthusiasm in local ways where there is a lot of need both in our community and in growing the membership of our church and in growing the faith of those in our community.
 - Bethel used to be a beacon in our community - to believers and nonbelievers. With recent changes I think it can be so again.
 - We are lukewarm here with opportunity for growth: we have recently been more inwardly focused instead of outwardly/mission focused. We have some history of doing that, though, and we can restart and refocus that opportunity to serve.
 - Bethel was just beginning to grow in the outward focus prior to Covid. I think it's taken a few steps back and hasn't regained that momentum.
 - I feel some members are aware of our global outreach and mission work but it I not communicated or encouraged to the general congregation.
 - Bethel has never been actively involved in evangelizing Cornelius. We've pretty much left that to Grace Covenant and at some point in time the Baptists. The initiative to evangelize our community must be prefaced by an understanding that we have many upstanding citizens that are spiritually lost. In the past we have had Bible studies focused on sharing our faith, ie evangelism. Follow-through on such studies has been weak.
 - Watchmen of the Streets started at Bethel and we should be very proud and supportive of that organization. Sending volunteers to Haiti. Partnering with the Community Care Center is also a great way to support our neighbors. We need to continue to do acts of service like food or collecting items for those in need.
 - Bethel HAS NOT had an outward focus for some years now. I am not talking about an international focus - I am referring to a focus right here in our town of Cornelius. We have communities on both ends of the income spectrum - Smithville and The Peninsula. In their own way, both communities are spiritually impoverished. I have never hear any discussion of how we can impact either community. Yet, there are Churches in town, with smaller memberships than Bethel, that are absolutely making a difference in this community. Bethel is only an after- thought in this characteristic of a vibrant Church...
 - Zoom SS; internet church, praise band to outdoor venues, Watchmen support, Etc
 - Some of these questions are very hard to answer , partially due to the fact that I am only familiar with one Sunday School class and the 11:00 church service. It seems there is very low activity/membership with the 19-40 year age category.
 - I don't think we do a terrible job but we definitely don't do a great job at being outwardly focused - but I think we can't do everything but we need to remember that ultimately the great commission is why we are here
- Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #7(Leadership Team)
- Bethel is an inward focused church. Bethel serves its youth well, and its leaders ensure that Bethel sends appropriate funds to the mission field. The majority of the congregation does not seem mission focused at this time.
 - I can not answer the question with out proper knowledge. That does not mean that the "outward focus" is not being achieved.

Wise Administration & Accountability

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #8(Congregation)

- We need a major overhaul in the area of communication
- Administration and session activities are somewhat obscure to the general membership.
- Bethel spent over \$68,000 for consultants with little or no results, process, application, and communication of vision changes to the congregation. It tied up the leadership and consumed them without a bottom line for congregational life or an understanding by the congregation. Communication of vision, goals, progress, etc. from the pulpit and church communications was spotty and inconsistent. There is a lack of transparency from the leadership to the congregation and a lack of accountability.
- There has been a wall between the Session and the congregation that I see coming down. Please continue to keep the Session minutes available and to bring more opportunities for communication before major issues are addressed
- Bethel is very generous in providing the materials needed and in caring for the staff. The process of hiring when a staff member leaves needs to be speeded up and improved.
- Six months ago my answer would have been a "3" but I think this is a change in progress.
- We are blessed in that our congregation if financially very well off. Our committee structure runs fairly well. We don't have a great succession plan. I also think we could do a better job of holding people accountable on staff to actual results. I hear anecdotes about how they are doing but I don't see actual numbers. We don't get comparisons of attendance month over month or year over year at worship or Sunday school or youth. I honestly think no person has come to know Jesus because of Bethel for quite some time. That is shameful. We exist to spread the love of Jesus and help people to come to know him but we don't do it. The choir waxes and wanes. We do well with managing to a budget. We have contemplated a capital expansion project for years but have not executed. We did purchase the youth building and paid it off quickly so I am proud that we have no debt but we really lack a vision at this time.
- Staff seems good but I do not know enough to be able to answer this question.

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #8(Leadership Team)

- There have been too many changes and hurdles over the past three years to have an effective plan in place.

Networking with the Body of Christ

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #9(Congregation)

- We were having combined services, choir recitals, but since Susan left that has stopped. I would love to see that happen again. • Bethel has historically been very involved with the community Thanksgiving service.
- The best networking that I saw happen was with Pastor Aaron's first service with us when we had a joint worship service and both types of music combined. It was beautiful! Not only was it a fabulously coordinated service and inspirational, but it was symbolic of how all of our members could come together to worship together in a unified way with our new pastor. We should do this regularly! I often hear people talk about how they don't know people from the other service. Adding in a once a month joint service where everyone worships as one, in a unified service would be a great way to help us all network together with the Body of Christ.
- We participate with Neighborhood Care Center which is sponsored by all the churches in the area. Grace Covenant is lead on this. We participate

in the community Thanksgiving service. Other than that we keep to ourselves. The church of my youth we had something called "Singspiration" on a Sunday night where churches traveled to other churches and sang hymns and ate cookies. It was a nice time of fellowship with other churches. I wish we could do it. I love the community Thanksgiving service and try to never miss it. Our choir joins with the other choirs it is wonderful. In years past we had Christmas Eve with the Moravians and that was wonderful but we stopped doing that. I'm not sure why it was stopped. We could also do a better job of mixing with other race churches. The AME Zion churches would be a great place to start.

- The community Thanksgiving service comes to mind but not sure if that still happens post covid.
- This is something that I really am not familiar with - within our own community - I have helped serve with the Neighborhood Care Center in the past - I think they try hard to pull in churches - Bethel has done Ok - not great at participating there - Bethel really needs new energy poured into it - It has a lot of potential
- We are very lacking in this way

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #9(Leadership Team)

- Bethel does not meet with other churches other than the occasional Thanksgiving service or Presbytery event.

Stewardship & Generosity

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #10(Congregation)

- The only way I know about the budget is through the weekly emails. It seems like the budget is good, but no info has been given to each one's gifts and linking them into the life of the church.
- We need a more comprehensive stewardship campaign annually
- Many persons are faithful and generous. However, this is not because of a "stewardship program".
- I appreciate the annual church meeting when Mark goes over the budget and plan for the year. Most entertaining accounting presentations I've ever heard.

- I think we need more communication with the general congregation in these matters. I think those who are aware think because they know.

Everyone else knows.

- We tithe with the church budget at least. At least 10% is given to missions. We never run out of money. If we do, and we ask, people will give. Our Foundation needs to be publicized more. It is a great source of additional funds.
- I think members of Bethel are generous and church leaders are good stewards of those funds.
- Relationship of membership to annual income, says that most do not take stewardship and presented in the Bible very seriously • Although I know the church has an extensive list of organizations that it is or has supported, I don't know enough to rate
- Again - I believe that like volunteering - there is a core group that is providing the majority of support for Bethel - If a special need is presented Bethel always rises to the occasion - and it has deep pockets - but I am not sure how well we are teaching the next generation

Unedited additional comments from Characteristic #10(Leadership Team)

- Bethel steps up when it is needed and ensures financial requirements are met. There has not been much in the way of Financial training in many years (although we have had Crown Financial and similar classes in the past).

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

SPEAKER 1: So before we get into the questions, and we will -- and I think it will go pretty fast once we get into it. I want to give you just a little bit of background of why Wednesday night and -- just a little bit of background.

In June, we did a survey, and I don't know if everyone in the room participated in the survey or not because that was also anonymous, but part -- there were so many open-ended questions where people indicated that they really would like to see a Wednesday night program or a little more robust Bible study. And so I just wanted to read you some of the -- a few of the comments to that end:

"I think our church could do more in this area of spiritual discipline, a weeknight program, i.e. Wednesday evening, could be very effective in helping us strengthen ourselves in this area."

"A lot of us work. There are no programs in the evenings. An offering outside of Sunday morning, such as Wednesday Night Ignite program we had in the past, would be a great addition."

These are all separate comments so these are not all from the same person. I'm just kind of skipping along.

"We need to bring back Wednesday night dinner for families to engage youth and working parents."

"I know everyone says Wednesday night programs are a thing of the past, but I promise that is where a lot of the strong relationships still exist in the church formed and children love them. More opportunities in this area are needed. I like the idea of Wednesday night opportunities."

And just a few more: "I would like to participate in a Bible study in the future in a night group."

"Pastor-led Bible study is something that people would want to see" -- to the question of, "How can Bethel be more effective in helping you grow as a disciple?"

"Offer joint Bible studies for men and women together."

"Bring back Wednesday night programs. I enjoyed our previous Wednesday night event where I could join a Bible study."

"More Bible studies and workshops."

"More options for small group Bible studies/teaching."

"Bible studies for working people not during the day."

"Need more time in studying the Bible and so more Bible study activities."

"Need a Bible study."

"Teach more classes."

"Possibly a Wednesday night a service or something more than 20 minutes on Sunday."

"I would like to have a discipleship class."

And then, lastly, "Bethel should continue to offer new and different opportunities to address different ways to grow as a disciple of Jesus."

So, you know, in taking all of these comments and the many other comments, you know, and given that I've done Wednesday night programs in the past, it seemed like an opportunity that Bethel might jump at. And, you know, when we offered the registration, we had -- was it like -- something like 150 people registered for the Experiencing God study?

And then, of course, we had some natural attrition, and I think we got down to about half of that by the end of 12 long weeks. So all of that, I want to -- I've invited you guys to

answer and come into conversation with these 14 questions. They're open-ended questions. Some of them are yes or no. One of them I know is a rate the quality, and you can give feedback on that.

Hopefully, you've had a chance to kind of look at the questions ahead of time. I wanted you to think about them before you're asked open-ended questions.

And so why don't we jump in with Question Number 1: Did -- in the past and perhaps for the future, does Wednesday night work effectively in your schedule for a churchwide gathering? How about some feedback there?

SPEAKER 5: Yes.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Yes?

SPEAKER 6: Yes, in general.

SPEAKER 9: I said yes.

SPEAKER 10: It works, obviously, for us too. "John" had football practice on Wednesday night so I think that's one of the things that you naturally run into with, you know, children and teenagers that there are some, for a season, they have a sport or an activity, but I don't think it means you don't do Wednesday nights because there are some kids who can't participate.

SPEAKER 1: Any other feedback/comments on that?

SPEAKER 4: I mean, it -- it's just the best option. You know, to your point, like, there's not a perfect option. And we couldn't go to every single one either because we had things going on, but I think Wednesday is the best because it's the middle of the week; it's the furthest from Sunday. You know, you're kind of, like, starting that look to the weekend again. And as you read out, I mean, almost all the comments were no so subtly suggesting Wednesdays.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, yeah. All the comments I read. Now, there were hundreds of comments. Yeah, thank you.

SPEAKER 3: "John," I would say that if you -- that if it hadn't been 12 weeks; it had been more like eight weeks, there might have been a better perfection in registering because you would -- you often know your calendar two months out but not necessarily three months out.

SPEAKER 1: Right. Right.

SPEAKER 3: So you kind of know whether you were going to be able to participate fully or not, so...

SPEAKER 1: That's good. Sometimes we're limited by the study itself.

SPEAKER 3: I agree.

SPEAKER 1: You know, this one was a 12-week study. And even that, we weren't -- we didn't have one week on each unit. For the last unit, we had to do two.

So I know not everyone participated, who came to the study, in the dinner. So the question here is, did you participate in the dinner, and if you didn't can you give a reason? Maybe you started to participate and you stopped, or -- let's talk about the dinner for a minute. Did you guys participate in the dinner?

SPEAKER 7: (Nods head up and down).

SPEAKER 4: Yes.

SPEAKER 5: Most of the time.

SPEAKER 1: You guys did? You did? You did? Okay.

SPEAKER 4: We did at first. And our reason for not continuing to go was a little bit more just, like, we had bought half a cow, so we were just trying to ---

SPEAKER 1: Oh. Yeah -- trying to cook the cow.

SPEAKER 4: --- cook this food and that kind of stuff. So I don't think it's relevant, you know -- but it wasn't anything anyone else did. You know what I mean?

SPEAKER 2: We went to the first one, but to be honest with you, just like tonight, traffic is just so hard, and it's -- some days I'm coming from uptown, and getting here at

6:00 is very difficult. 5:30 is, like, next to impossible from Huntersville. So traffic, for us, was the biggest reason we didn't come.

SPEAKER 1: Okay.

SPEAKER 10: That makes sense.

SPEAKER 1: So anybody -- so everybody else participated and, kind of, carried through?

OVERALL GROUP: (Nods head up and down.)

SPEAKER 1: So what -- on the quality of the food -- now, I want you to be honest. Again, your names are not going to be published, but on a scale of one to ten, with one being poor quality and ten being, you know, just five star, how would you rate the quality of dinner that was provided?

SPEAKER 7: Ten. That cake was amazing.

SPEAKER 9: I said a ten just because it's great to have someone else fix dinner.

SPEAKER 1: So it's ten -- ten, more of a thanksgiving...

SPEAKER 8: And I gave -- I said a seven. I thought it was extremely well prepared for a large gathering at church, right?

SPEAKER 3: Yes.

SPEAKER 8: I mean, you can't expect -- you know, the restaurant we love is Craft Bistro in West Jefferson, right? And I don't expect Craft Bistro when I come here on Wednesday nights. So I thought it was terrific. I think she did a good job, but I'm sure there's probably some -- could be improved somehow.

SPEAKER 3: I heard one mother say to her child, "Next week, let's bring our own milk."

SPEAKER 1: Okay.

SPEAKER 3: And I heard another person say, "I'd pay more for better quality."

SPEAKER 1: Oh, okay. What -- and what about you?

SPEAKER 3: Personally?

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 3: I would have given it a five. I mean, it was kind of mediocre meal that I fix at home two nights a week, you know. I mean, it wasn't spectacular. It didn't keep me from coming nor make me want to come. It was just there.

SPEAKER 1: It was just dinner.

SPEAKER 3: Yep.

SPEAKER 5: "John" and I have such a different perspective.

SPEAKER 1: You mean speaker number 3? No, I'm just ---

SPEAKER 5: We really do have such a different perspective. Back in Hickory, our Wednesday night suppers were prepared by a member of our church who was the owner and chef of the poshest restaurant in town. He was -- and he was paid staff. He was part-time paid staff. So I don't feel like we should even be allowed to answer that question.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. You were spoiled.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah, we were spoiled rotten, actually. So, yeah, in Hickory, it was just an impossibly high bar. But still, even saying that, I would rate that a seven. I would also go on to say -- because I checked this out when you -- you know, when you asked me the question. I texted a friend back home. The per plate charge in Hickory now is \$9, and that's for chef-prepared.

And I would just kind of think that if we want to keep the costs low and keep volunteers involved in preparing it, maybe it would be good to have a rotation of maybe, like, four to six simple meals: Hot dogs, hamburgers, spaghetti, pizza. You know, it's just a thought.

SPEAKER 10: Keep it simple.

SPEAKER 5: Keep it simple.

SPEAKER 1: Do you have anything to add?

SPEAKER 6: Just two things to reinforce what she was saying and what some of the others have said. You want to -- a) you want to keep it affordable. You have a family of four, even a modest amount of money, week after week or over two months, can add up. I think the fact that

it's volunteer is something to keep in mind. You want to keep things that are not going to require four people to be here for four hours or six hours. I'm -- of course, I don't do that. Maybe that's what it does require. Maybe that's -- the one who did, it did require that.

So I think for what it is, which is a driver for fellowship and gathering, really -- it's not a restaurant so I don't expect restaurant quality and diversity. You're not going to get three entrees on a week -- Wednesday night. You're going to have sort of a single focus. And some weeks it's going to work, and other weeks, it's not going to work.

I would rate it at least an eight, because I think for what it's intended purpose was, and it being volunteer driven, I think it was quite good. It's not a ten probably is just how picky I am rather than a reflection of the food itself.

SPEAKER 10: So we have had, also, the same or similar experience of in the past, having a chef prepare it. So you just -- you expect a different quality when it's a professional versus a volunteer. But I'm with you, person number whatever that is, if I don't have to cook it, then I'm so happy, and it's worth it. It's worth every -- yeah.

It's great, and I agree too that I felt like the cost was low because in the past, we paid more because, you know, we had a chef.

SPEAKER 1: So here's a question that I'm curious about. Number 4: During the fellowship dinner, those of you who came to dinner on a regular basis, did you find yourself sitting in the same place among the same people week after week?

SPEAKER 9: No.

SPEAKER 3: No.

SPEAKER 9: No, we deliberate -- I think we deliberately -- or I deliberately and you just followed me -- but anyway, chose different people that we could sit with and get to know and talk to or meet.

SPEAKER 3: Same here.

SPEAKER 5: It was especially important for us because we're the newbies, so that was a great chance for us to get meet more people.

SPEAKER 1: So did you intentionally sit in different places?

SPEAKER 5: Yeah, we tried to rotate around some.

SPEAKER 1: Good. Good.

SPEAKER 6: Maybe she -- I think -- I trust her memory better than mine. So to me, it sort of seemed like we moved towards the same spot each week, but I may just not have been paying careful enough attention because I didn't anticipate this question.

I will tell you that on Sunday mornings -- it has nothing to do with the survey, but on Sunday mornings, I try to make a little more of an effort -- probably less now, since -- because I'm new, but I try not to gravitate towards a specific pew every week. I've got maybe five or six in there, sort of -- it just depends on who's there or not.

I think that's important for us to getting comfortable at the church. And that's like Wednesday night added to that. So I was glad to see you add the question.

SPEAKER 1: Well, that really was the motivation of the question is are we actually getting to fellowship with people we don't see every week? Are we having conversations with people -- with different people on a week in/week out.

SPEAKER 6: To that question -- that comment. That's one of the reasons I like it so much. You have the Sunday morning, the two services, and rare -- people that attend one service probably do that 90-95 percent of the time. Same thing for the traditional service, so this is an opportunity where I think the opportunity is there for more meeting people.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 6: That's what it is for us.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. Highlight that statement in the text there. Because that really is part of the work that I'm doing is trying to get people together.

SPEAKER 3: Bring us to be -- do one congregation instead of two.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 7: I was going to say we typically stayed in our same little vicinity, but it was interesting because every week, there was always, like, different people who were there. So we still had that fellowship.

SPEAKER 1: So everyone else moved.

SPEAKER 7: Yeah, everyone else moved, and we were just like, there's new people here, nice to meet you.

SPEAKER 1: Anybody else?

SPEAKER 10: I have a question. Does Bethel have round tables that are located upstairs that can be used on Wednesday nights?

SPEAKER 9: They used to.

SPEAKER 2: I think so. I'm not 100 percent, but I think so.

SPEAKER 3: Where were the round tables kept?

SPEAKER 2: Underneath the stage.

SPEAKER 3: Weren't those -- I thought those were the ---

SPEAKER 2: It's the long only? You might be right. I was thinking we had round ones up there at one point.

SPEAKER 3: I think we have had them. I'm just not sure we still have them.

SPEAKER 2: They may not be.

SPEAKER 5: I'm sure I remember that we used some round tables at least once for a Presbyterian Women type gathering.

SPEAKER 10: Oh, okay.

SPEAKER 5: I'm almost sure. And while we're on the subject of tables, some rectangular ones down here would be really nice. Just saying.

SPEAKER 1: Almost switch, yeah.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. So moving into the actual study of Experiencing God by Henry and Richard and Mike Blackaby, did you find this study rewarding, cumbersome, enriching? How would you describe your individual engagement with the study? Now, this is outside of the group. This is you and the book and the Lord. You know, how was your individual time with the study?

SPEAKER 7: Mega enlightning. I mean, I came from not having any sort of understanding -- deeper understanding of religion and you know, Jesus and God, you know, just the outskirts of that. And so I've always associated it to me just kind of sitting on top of the church listening to everyone but actually never going into the church.

And so for me, it was very just enlightning, very profound. It made me want to know more. And it made me want to keep going and praying and, you know, look for the signs and things like that.

SPEAKER 1: That's good.

SPEAKER 10: That's really good.

SPEAKER 5: I thought it was incredibly enriching. I loved it.

SPEAKER 2: I would like to see us do it again, to be honest with you. It was so...

SPEAKER 5: It was so much.

SPEAKER 2: It was a lot, and it was all very high quality. And it would like, you know, get you to look at the same scripture that you'd looked at multiple times, and the Spirit would lighten it a little bit differently, and then you'd get in a group, and then it was enlightened a little bit differently. And I thought it was really deep. The only -- not criticism I have of it is, you know, the examples were always, like, Moses and, you know, you may get called to bring the ---

SPEAKER 1: Lead millions ---

SPEAKER 2: --- exiles out of the -- you know, and it was like what about our -- you know, examples about our daily life? And so think we tried to do that in our groups more, but I mean, that's a reach for a criticism. I thought it was a phenomenal study.

SPEAKER 3: I would like to do it again and do it at a time when I truly -- I'm doing three Bible studies right now. That's way too many, but I would like to do it at a time when I had an

hour each day, not 20 minutes, not 30 minutes, but a full hour, because I could've gotten so much more out of it. But I cheated too much, you know, I just -- I tried to cram it in, and toward the end of the book, I quit trying to fill in every blank and just take what I could and massage that and not try to fill in the blank.

SPEAKER 1: Do you feel like you grew in your walk with Christ.

SPEAKER 6: Oh, absolutely.

SPEAKER 5: Slightly.

SPEAKER 3: Oh, yeah, but I do think Mark is right in that I thought the examples, and sometimes the vocabulary, was a little too -- heavy is not the word. Too strong. In other words -- I think I wrote it here. Not everything is a crisis. Not everything is major. Not everything is a burden. I mean, those words were used when sometimes I would have used a less strong...

SPEAKER 9: "Jane" -- and "Jane" did ---

SPEAKER 3: Say that.

SPEAKER 9: --- in one of the sessions when we were talking about a "crisis," you said you would rather it be called an -- you said ---

SPEAKER 2: Decision?

SPEAKER 8: A dilemma, didn't it?

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 1: A dilemma. I like that.

SPEAKER 9: Rather than crisis, and we talked -- and I'm giving you the credit because "Jane's" the one that said it. But it was really good.

SPEAKER 3: And not everything needed to be a major adjustment. Not every -- one of those ones that really got me was they call it the "burden for evangelism." Or the author called it the "burden for evangelism," and gosh, I always thought evangelism was a gift. You -- it was given -- it's a gift that one -- some people have more than others have. So I just thought some of the wording ---

SPEAKER 1: So yeah --

SPEAKER 3: I stumbled.

SPEAKER 1: --- instead of burden, maybe passion.

SPEAKER 3: Yes. Something positive, not negative. So that would be a criticism that I had.

SPEAKER 7: I was going to say the wording too, because there were certain, like, I guess, chapters in each unit where I was, like, I'm not really feeling this. I don't really -- I don't like that. So.

SPEAKER 9: So Number 1 person, here, a lot of times, he would say, "I'm not agreeing with this lesson. I'm having a hard time. I'm going to have a hard time this week with this lesson." I'd say, "Well, let me go get started."

SPEAKER 8: But, you know, I did find it extremely rewarding and -- but, you know, there was a lot of things that it said that I personally didn't agree with, or I challenged, right?

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 8: And I shared that with the classes as we went around through it.

SPEAKER 1: And did you find some commiseration with others in the class?

SPEAKER 8: Yes, when we -- "Jane" for one, right? When I said that, I said, "I'm struggling with this right here," and she said, "Yeah, crisis?" She said -- that's when she spoke up and said that. And that was not the only incident, right. I enjoyed the study absolutely. So I thought it was just terrific. You know, I thought -- and this is maybe just me, right, but I thought some of the video, it seemed like in terms of a Bible study, there was more "I" and "we" and point -- experiences of their family.

SPEAKER 3: Or their congregation.

SPEAKER 8: Experience is what they did, what they've done, what they did. And I thought, man, I don't know, I've never heard a pastor give so many -- well, I have, okay, but it seemed like they're all -- I don't know. I should stop. It was really, really good, and I truly mean that.

SPEAKER 1: Maybe what you're saying is the balance between the Biblical examples and the real-life examples were maybe just a little bit out of balance with the real-life examples being more prominent.

SPEAKER 8: Right, but I -- I did. I thought it was a terrific study.

SPEAKER 1: Not that the Bible are not real-life examples, but...

SPEAKER 9: It was challenging and rewarding and encouraging.

SPEAKER 1: Good. Good. Okay.

SPEAKER 8: By the time Wednesday got here, I was typically, you know -- and I shared this with the folks, right? I'd start on Thursday each day -- you know, the day after, I'd start the next week. Sometimes Friday/Saturday, I'm thinking, man, I don't think I can do this lesson, right? I'm just not getting it. But then by the time I got through and had prayed and the Holy Spirit spoke to me, by the time Wednesday would come around, I was excited to get here and share the lesson.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, that's good.

SPEAKER 2: I've got a follow-up question just for "John" probably, because he taught as well. I got zero out of the user guide, the leader guide.

SPEAKER 8: Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: I looked at it once, and I was like, I can't do anything with this. I didn't know if anybody else ---

SPEAKER 1: I didn't go back to it.

SPEAKER 8: No, it was -- I thought it was not helpful at all, and in fact, one week, somebody subbed for me.

SPEAKER 9: "John?"

SPEAKER 8: No. No. But anyway, "Jane" and... geez. This is ridiculous?

SPEAKER 1: "Jane?" "Jane?"

SPEAKER 9: No, no. It was --

SPEAKER 3: Female or male?

SPEAKER 8: Male. Been here forever. It was a banker.

SPEAKER 9: "John Doe."

SPEAKER 8: "John Doe." So "John" subbed for me one time, right? And I gave him that leader's guide book because he said, "I need the leader's guide book." And I said, "Here you go." And the next week, he came to me, and he said, "Do you ever get anything out of that leader's guide?" I said, "No." He said, "That thing was absolutely worthless."

SPEAKER 2: It was.

SPEAKER 8: It was. I didn't get anything out of it. I quit going to it like you said, "John."

SPEAKER 2: One day, man, and I said, "I can't get anything out of this."

SPEAKER 1: I used it for two weeks, then I was done.

SPEAKER 2: I didn't look at it after the first day.

SPEAKER 1: That's good. That's good to know.

SPEAKER 7: I was going to say, my wife even made the -- and that's funny you mention it because my wife's suggestion was having some sort of lesson plan so that way it's like each group is kind of in the same realm, same boat ---

SPEAKER 1: Oh.

SPEAKER 7: --- and so that's good to know. So I'll take that back to her.

SPEAKER 1: We're going to get to that in just a minute. So save that comment for when we talk about the pluses and minuses of the rotation, which we'll get to in just a minute.

SPEAKER 7: Okay. Got you. Got you.

SPEAKER 1: Did you complete most of the homework each week?

SPEAKER 5: Yes.

SPEAKER 3: No.

SPEAKER 9: Most. But honestly, I didn't.

SPEAKER 8: If you can say complete, I covered, and I spent time with it. Did I answer every blank?

SPEAKER 3: Right.

SPEAKER 8: Every question?

SPEAKER 3: No.

SPEAKER 8: Did I fill out every blank? No. No, I picked and choosed.

SPEAKER 2: Same.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah, and I did the same. To me, when I say I did all my homework, I did all the reading and the questions that I thought were particularly thought-provoking, I would answer them.

SPEAKER 8: Right.

SPEAKER 5: But I didn't fill in every single blank.

SPEAKER 10: I think I started out filling in every single blank -- and we've been through it before, but near the end, I kind of decided if some of them weren't as applicable, then I was, like, why do I need to make something up just to put something down in the blanks?

SPEAKER 7: I found myself on a couple going -- like, when it will ask me, you know, what did you find interesting; scriptures, statements, I would literally circle and then draw an arrow and say, "I loved this." What do you want to ---

SPEAKER 5: Me too.

SPEAKER 7: --- in prayer? This whole thing.

SPEAKER 1: Can't cut and paste.

SPEAKER 10: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Well, let's talk about the group, your group experience. Did you find your group and the conversations around your study to be substantive and enriching? And let me -- let me just say -- let's save -- those of you who were group leaders, we'll save your comments for the end. So did you find your discussions substantive and enriching?

SPEAKER 7: I think so, for us. I think one of the things for us, though, was that we were the much, much younger crowd. So our views and thoughts of things were very different from the rest of the group.

And so I know from -- like, for our perspective, it would have been nicer to have, like, be in, I guess, a group setting where more people around our age to kind of discuss that kind of stuff. Or even, I guess, you know, if not that, then, you know, every few weeks maybe switch up and put it -- like have different groups and different, you know, things.

SPEAKER 4: I like the idea of maybe switching it up like that. I like that. But I do maybe have, like, a little bit of an opposite view on the demographics of our group. We were with, you know -- we were probably the youngest people in there, but I thought that that was pretty interesting because, you know, growing up in the church but not really having -- really not being at Wednesday night since I was a kid, you know, I felt like I was a little bit on the other side of it this time.

And so I felt like I understood a little bit more of what my parents got out of it when I was a kid. I don't know if that makes any sense, but to me it does, because I was like, okay, this is what they were doing when I was there, and this is why it's important.

And then it -- I want to go back real quick to the videos and stuff. I do think it was very anecdotal, you know, the videos with the father and son, and at first, it kind of turned me off a little bit. It felt a little bit weird just to kind of have both of them emceeding up there, but the more I watched it, the more I found it a little bit interesting, just as a younger father, myself. And encouraging.

In particular, I really liked some of the conversations that he was having towards the end where he was talking about his son struggling with the insomnia and stuff like that. I thought that was a good example because it's one of those things that sounds almost innocuous to someone who's never struggled with it. I don't -- I've never struggled with insomnia, so to me, at first, it seemed like oh, you know, it's insomnia. He can't sleep, right? But it reminded me of the struggles that I had as a kid that were very real to me. And then it gave me a little bit of a better perspective on some things my own son is going through.

So for me, I felt like what I got out of it maybe wasn't the intent of the Bible study, but it was incredibly helpful for me, so that's kind of my thought on it.

SPEAKER 1: No, that's good. Well, you know, you guys bring up an issue from Question 10, and since you both brought it up, I want to just go there, and then we'll circle back. But there was an intention. The group makeups were intentional. You were, you know, the youngest people in your group on purpose. You know, we didn't put you in the same demographic categories, and a lot of that was because of our Sunday Schools are mostly broken up by demographic.

And recognizing that, calling it Wednesday Night Together, how can we integrate our age groups? How can we integrate those folks who have been at Bethel for generations and those who have just arrived, you know? And so the makeup of these groups were to that end. And so then the question is in Number 10 is did you notice -- and you guys obviously noticed that.

SPEAKER 7: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: Maybe other people didn't notice that; it wasn't as pronounced to them. And did you find it helpful, not helpful, a nonfactor? You found it helpful?

SPEAKER 7: I would say mostly helpful, but it was kind of those -- it was one of those things where it was like, man, it would be cool to just see how other people's perspective, like, within our age. But then, at the same time, I always thought, well, it would be really neat if we had, you know, two or three sessions with the same people and then take us and put us, like, in a completely different group and then take us, like, every couple weeks.

SPEAKER 3: I found it really helpful and very interesting to hear the difference in our perceptions by age. But a question that I have, and maybe you have the information or maybe you do not: I wondered if the retention or the absenteeism showed a pattern. Were there certain groups that experienced more, or didn't, or experienced less. Or certain ages that quit coming or whatever. If so, I have a thought about that. Is this the proper time?

SPEAKER 1: I haven't analyzed the data, but what is -- what is your thought?

SPEAKER 3: My thought is people my age are -- I'm close to 80 -- I'm getting to the point where I'm not comfortable driving at night. Had it been a rainy fall and there had been rain, I would not have been here every time. As it was, I only missed once, but my point is that there are lots of reasons why people are absent, and they're not all having anything at all to do with how we're teaching, what were eating, who we're with, or whatever. There are other circumstances that drive our...

SPEAKER 1: Attendance.

SPEAKER 3: Our attendance, yes.

SPEAKER 6: Do you want to add to that?

SPEAKER 5: Well, yeah. We -- one of the biggest blessings that we have is that we landed a mile and a half from the church.

SPEAKER 6: We literally said that on the way over here tonight.

SPEAKER 5: You know, but I can easily see what you're saying. You know, if we were further away, it would be a problem for us. But -- but we're just -- we're so lucky.

SPEAKER 3: And until a few years ago, we lived, like you, about a mile and a half away. Now, we live 20 minutes to 30 minutes away. And it -- I dreaded when the Daylight Savings changed our ---

SPEAKER 5: Me too.

SPEAKER 3: Because that became more of a factor. But anyway, that's just one example of why people might -- why attendance might be of interest to study.

SPEAKER 7: There's no excuse for me not to be there because I can walk to my house from here, so... But I mean, you know, the days I wasn't able to make it was either because there was just something going on with kid stuff or because I work at the bank, there's always this movement of things every month end.

SPEAKER 2: Called money.

SPEAKER 7: Yes. I try not to call it that.

SPEAKER 10: One thought I had. I know that rotating the leaders -- I know that that was intentional. But just thinking, though, like in other times when maybe there have been groups or we've been a part of groups on Wednesday nights when the leaders don't rotate, I can see how that can help with, like, you know, "Person Number 5" isn't there or whatever, you know, for three weeks in a row, then there can be, like, a text or a phone call or whatever. Like, hey, missed you. You know what I mean?

Whereas, because the leaders were rotating, you know, we didn't really have that kind of interaction. But it's just a thought.

SPEAKER 1: Any more thoughts on the group conversation or the group generational dynamics? And if you guys want to chime in at this point too.

SPEAKER 5: I was just going to say that I would have liked for there to have been more discussion. I thought that there were a lot of thought-provoking questions in Blackaby. I would like to have seen -- to have seen more discussion. To me, that's the real value of Bible study is probing deep questions together. I would have liked more of that.

SPEAKER 4: Ironically, I think the first day, it was kind of interesting, because I think it was more of a get to know each other thing, but we went around and talked about what high school we went to.

And obviously, people from all over, so they have different experiences and stuff, but it felt like to me -- it kind of turned into, like, a little bit of a -- kind of a comedic side conversation about, you know, what denomination people grew up in and stuff like that, because we were also asked how they got to the church and stuff.

And for me personally, I found that really enlightening. It kind of sent me down, like, a little path for a few weeks that I'm still a little bit on that I, kind of, was doing a little bit more research about why the different denominations were the way that they were, what the core of the, you know, disagreements were, kind of, even like things that had influence that we could see today.

And I found it really interesting, I think, especially because I grew up in a church in Fuquay-Varina near Raleigh, and it was just called Wake Chapel Christian Church. And so it was technically nondenominational. I realize now it's probably a mix of like Presbyterian, Baptist or something like that. But some of the conversations that we had, and were really just kind of jokes amongst other people, kind of set me off into an interest in kind of what that meant, what actually has meaning, what's not just a difference without a real distinction and stuff like that.

So for me, it was like -- it's hard to recommend that solely for that reason, because it wasn't necessarily the purpose of that conversation, but I think that's also kind of what you get as collateral damage in a good way when you introduce people of different generations.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

SPEAKER 3: Uh-huh (yes). That's good.

SPEAKER 1: Anybody else on that topic?

SPEAKER 9: The only thing that I had on my comment, too, is I did notice the different ages, but also, like, I would -- stayed with -- I didn't rotate around. But I like having -- and we've heard other people in the church say this, instead of a woman's Bible study and a men's Bible study, but the couple's, a couple study.

And this ended up being a time where, you know, because we were together, our -- you know, we talked a lot about conversation that we might not have about different scripture or, "What do you think? How do you -- how does this...?" You know. So I -- we like the couple.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. That's interesting. I wonder how many of you who came with your spouses -- and I think all of you did -- did you have some of these conversations at home?

SPEAKER 7: Every day.

SPEAKER 9: We did too.

SPEAKER 8: We did every day. We took a trip, you know, that was typically the topic of conversation.

SPEAKER 7: My wife loves me even more now.

SPEAKER 1: So how about the time? Was there enough time to get through all the material?

SPEAKER 3: Do you mean week by week, or do you mean during the ---

SPEAKER 1: During the group discussion?

SPEAKER 3: Okay.

SPEAKER 7: That one's an interesting one because I feel like we could definitely go more, but it's also going to be up to us to be more open about, you know, our experiences with it and our understanding with it. And I think that, in my opinion, is something that's very difficult to do with a lot of people, which makes it very difficult in that kind of setting where, you know, you start asking questions and then people just kind of -- (quietly) "I'm not going to answer it" kind of thing, you know, and -- I don't know.

And it's not -- you don't want to go in and say, "Hey, you, tell me more about it," you know. I don't know. It's -- I feel like you could get so much more in it, and you could -- it could be, like, a two-hour thing even, if you -- if you wanted it to be.

SPEAKER 3: And I think a lot of families would have left early or not come at all if it had gone much longer.

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 3: Because it's just hard to get your kids bathed and in bed.

SPEAKER 9: Yeah, it was hard to cover five days in an hour, and you don't want more than an hour. You -- either. You know?

SPEAKER 2: For me, I thought -- from a time perspective, it was interesting. To me, it was just, like, we're allocating an hour, and we're not going to go over the hour, which was, I think, appropriate. People can't stay beyond an hour. But -- and there was just so many different factors into whether or not we had time.

Like, one time, I literally -- right next door, there were five of us total. The next week, there were 35 in this room. The very next week. And so the level of discussion that you get into and -- and then, you know, a lot of people didn't do it, and we definitely encouraged them to come, and we didn't put them on the spot, right? And we just tried to get -- I tried to get people talking. I didn't go through, necessarily, the questions like, you know, who -- who has turned down God when He tried to get you to bring the exiles out --

SPEAKER 1: Like show of hands.

SPEAKER 2: Because those were the questions, right? This was not a Presbyterian study I don't think. These were the questions, right? And so it was like everybody had their own, you know...

SPEAKER 1: Tell us the story of when you disobeyed God.

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, exactly. Can you please share with us, right? So life application is really what I think all of us were after, and it was just trying to, you know, get people talking and without excluding anybody that didn't do the homework right?

So it was just so many different factors into whether or not we had the time. I think if -- to your point, if you had a bunch of people that was really going to go deep into the study, you could spend all day Saturday morning -- all Saturday morning and ---

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement)

SPEAKER 2: --- and not -- you could go three hours and look up and go, man, it's time to go. But people have to come in having gone that level of depth. Not everybody's there, right? And I think it's -- I think the Blackaby study will move you from a one to a three or a seven to a nine. You know what I mean?

It's like wherever you are in your -- that's why I said I think we should do it multiple times because I think it's -- every time we do it, we're going to move ourselves. We're going to be moved along that scale. Wherever we start -- we didn't all start as a seven or a one, right? So those are kinds of my thoughts on do we have enough time. I think it -- the time was well spent, but it would have been hard to spend any more time, though.

SPEAKER 1: Did you find the time too short?

SPEAKER 8: No, I really didn't. I mean, I'm big on a schedule, right? So I aimed to end at 7:30, and I ended at 7:30. If those remember -- I was prompt with my -- and I would all -- I expect -- that's something that if I was attending and somebody else was leading, I would expect them to finish, right? If there's going to be an appointed time -- so, you know, I've adjusted my stuff to fit that time even if it meant making an adjustment on the fly.

But I do think having a time to end, especially in the evenings, especially with families, right? When people have commitments and you don't -- you know, people have been gracious enough to come so you've got to -- I just think you have to respect their schedules. So you could always spend more time, right?

SPEAKER 3: Yep.

SPEAKER 1: Well, you mentioned, I think, the facilitators rotating. So what were the -- first of all, let me explain why -- how we came to that. When we first said we're going to do Experiencing God, you and I met first.

SPEAKER 2: Uh-huh (yes). We were going to do it.

SPEAKER 1: We were going to do it.

SPEAKER 2: 20 people.

SPEAKER 1: Yes. We were thinking we might get 50 people signed up and so you'll get 25; I'll get 25.

SPEAKER 2: No, I was the alternate. I was plan B, right? If you get more than 25 or so, we said -- if you get 26, I'll split with you, is basically what we said.

SPEAKER 1: And so when 150 people signed up, we really didn't want more than around 20 people, 25 at the tiptop most, in a group, because if you're going to facilitate conversation, you know, with that many people, some people don't like to speak up. It's easier in a group like this to speak up than it is when you've got twice this number.

So 150 people signed up. We're like, oh, we've got to -- we've got to do multiple groups. And so rather than changing the groups every week, it just seemed -- or -- or rather than -- and I felt like this -- this was probably coming from me. I didn't want people -- maybe they would do this with "John" as well. I didn't want people saying, "Well, I want to be in 'John's' group." And so "John" will have 60, and then I'll have 60, and then the other -- you know, we didn't want people gravitating to one facilitator.

So we said well, why don't we just rotate the facilitators rather than changing the groups. And so that's how that came about. That's why we did it that way. What were the advantages and disadvantages? You mentioned something.

SPEAKER 10: It was just being able to connect with people, just follow up with people if someone's out. And I think along with that, too, just not -- the facilitators maybe not getting to know the group as well. And then maybe the people not feeling as comfortable with the facilitator to respond to questions and speak up. That's just my take.

SPEAKER 3: I wrote this down. You asked me to be in this tonight about two or three meetings ago -- I think two meetings go. So I made it a point at the last two meetings to talk to other people about their experience and so on, because I knew we were going to get some questions.

Somebody said to me that some folks did not enjoy the makeup -- I wrote it down, the makeup of their group and found that some of the facilitators could not contain -- that was the word -- contain those individuals who monopolize conversation with their own needy -- again, that was the word used -- agendas.

And I think -- I can see that happening. It didn't happen in our group, as far as I know. I didn't hear anybody saying that sort of thing, but I can see that happening. And I think being careful that your facilitators are prepared for that. It's going to happen. I don't think it would be a lot of training to teach them certain phrases they can use or ways to move on to another comment and so on. I don't -- I don't think that should be a stumbling block in inviting nonprofessionals, nonclergy to lead a group.

But it does concern me that that -- the attitude concerns me, because I don't want to think that we are not accepting, that this is the only place that some people will find a

welcome environment. So I struggle with what they said; at the same time, I think it's important that we acknowledge that that does happen.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. Yeah. We probably, as facilitators, could have used a mid-study connect just to do some best practices, and what issues are we running into. Because I know when they say, "those people who monopolize time with their own issues," I know exactly -- I mean, I can probably put a list together of the people that I imagine that were probably the ones that did that. And how to pivot from -- some, maybe ways to, "Yeah, you know..."

SPEAKER 4: And it -- and that is -- I mean, that is valid, what you're saying. And it's also extremely hard to deal with. So I tried to give people on both sides of the situation a lot of grace, but it also is distracting sometimes, you know.

SPEAKER 3: Sure.

SPEAKER 2: The only thing I would say about -- I enjoyed the rotation as a facilitator. One quick aside, I thought the sanctuary was just a very difficult place.

OVERALL GROUP: (Some general group agreement).

SPEAKER 2: But regardless of that ---

SPEAKER 8: Now, this -- I know I'm interrupting, and I shouldn't, but that was probably my favorite place. And that's probably because I love the sanctuary so much. So just -- just saying ---

SPEAKER 2: For group discussion -- no, for group discussion, that was really what -- I struggled because the first time I was in there, you know, everybody was in the amen corner, and it didn't flow for me as well, because I like to get people -- my goal is to get people talking. And I'm not always successful at that, but it's harder when everybody's just looking at me. You know, they have to turn around to see who's back there talking.

So anyway, I didn't -- didn't care for that, but I did enjoy the rotation. And maybe to your point -- I think it was your point, which was you kind of had a different -- it wasn't a different curriculum but a different approach every night because you were rotating. And we know -- we didn't have the leader guide to standardize on, right?

SPEAKER 1: Yep.

SPEAKER 2: And I think -- I think style comes into it to a certain extent too. And so I think for some people, maybe that's -- maybe they like that variety. And others, maybe like -- would -- maybe, I would have gotten a little bit more out of it had the leaders standardized. I don't know. I kind of like the variety.

But I can definitely see the need, you know, to -- for a study like that if we all, kind of, standardize and go, well, you know, these were the -- this is the list -- it would have been great for us to pass out the questions to the people ahead of the study, because again, you know, you're not going to be asked to lead people out of Israel -- or I'm sorry, Egypt. Sorry -- Israelites. I promise I knew that. I promise.

It's like -- I think it might be the second book of the Bible. I'm not sure, but regardless -- but you know, it might have been good for us to, kind of, distill the questions down to life application, something that we could have said -- you know, and I know that would have taken a whole lot more work, but I think because the questions were so much in depth and because we had no standard, you're going to see a lot of variety. And plus, just -- and some people will like that. Some people will probably not like it as much.

SPEAKER 1: So did you? Did you like it? Was it -- was it a hindrance? Was it ---

SPEAKER 3: It wasn't a hindrance.

SPEAKER 6: I personally liked it a lot.

SPEAKER 5: Yeah.

SPEAKER 1: The variety?

SPEAKER 6: The variety. Again, you have to remember that I'm coming from the standpoint of I've only been here -- attending here regularly for a year or less than that. So I'm still trying to put names to faces, and rotating, hearing you one week and you one week and you one week, that helped me to simply to -- the difference in people.

Same message, same Lord, same Bible, but different -- you turn ten degrees this way, and it's like you're looking at something different. Not better, not worse, the difference. So I thoroughly enjoyed that.

SPEAKER 1: Did anybody not enjoy it?

SPEAKER 9: I'm going to suggest nametags, the type that you can -- you always -- I bought 50 of them. "John" said, "Oh, it's too late." But I've got them if you all -- I can donate them, but anyway, that they can -- all they have to do is put a new little paper. The youth could do that for us before that night and make them, right?

SPEAKER 8: Yeah, so you don't dispose them, and you don't have to worry about it falling off, sticking up. It just clips right on, right? So you may have seen "Jane" and I -- she actually got some for everybody but ended up not -- anyway.

SPEAKER 9: Well, there were only 50 of them.

SPEAKER 10: That's a great idea. I like that.

SPEAKER 9: I mean, because it ---

SPEAKER 8: To Mike's point, right, we came here for a long time, but then we were gone for a long time. And now, we're back, and there are so many new faces. I mean, there are faces like "Jane" I've known forever and will always know, okay. But I'm still remembering names, and unfortunately, I don't remember as well as I used to. So I've got a lot of names to learn. I'm sitting here with two of them right now.

SPEAKER 4: You've got to guess.

SPEAKER 7: Number 5.

SPEAKER 9: I should have brought those name tags.

SPEAKER 1: Number 5, yeah.

SPEAKER 6: Can I make one comment on that before you move on.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 6: Although it doesn't specifically address your question, the subject of the nametags is an interesting one for me because at our previous church, First -- Hickory First, they actually had nametags for each member. Did they wear them each Sunday? Of course not. Did I wear them each Sunday? Of course not. I wore mine when we were visiting here, and I'm convinced that helped -- "I don't -- may not know much about you, but I know you're 'John,' and you belong to 'Jane.'"

I wonder if there would be some value to all members of the church having a name tag. Again, with the caveat that not everybody's going to wear them all the time. Some people are going to refuse to wear them, but the first few weeks/months here, I would have given my eye teeth to be able -- you'd see me staring at some people because they actually -- you know, they actually have a name tag on. But my vision's not as good as it used to be, but I used that as much as I could, and it would have been nice -- or anytime I have the opportunity, I'm all over it.

SPEAKER 8: "John," I was one of those that used to would have never worn it, right? I just didn't like wearing nametags, but now, I wore that one every week because I want folks -- I'm trying to learn people's names, and I want them to know my name.

SPEAKER 7: I still have mine from my previous churches.

SPEAKER 9: You should have worn them.

SPEAKER 7: I know.

SPEAKER 5: We've still got ours.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. So we'll put that in the category of Question Number 12, but -- of what you would change. But we'll get to there in just a minute. Would you -- here's a question. Would you commit -- and this is not a -- "Are you going to commit?" This is just a -- given what we just experienced with our Wednesday night, would you be interested, would you commit, to another similar churchwide study group?

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 7: Absolutely.

SPEAKER 5: In a heartbeat.

SPEAKER 6: Yes to me as well.

SPEAKER 1: Anybody no?

SPEAKER 2: You know, I'll just add on. I am absolutely a yes. So I mean, we -- when I was on staff previously, right, I did, like, a study of all the folks that were in a Sunday School class or on Wednesday night and what they were doing in the church. And I found that almost all of them were serving in some capacity. Maybe it was elder; maybe it was deacon; maybe it was mission; maybe it was Christian Ed, right?

The people that are engaged, largely, are the people that are coming to these kinds of studies. So I think it's so -- it does so much for the health of the church, for fellowship, for so many things. Where we talk about the health of the body in this -- right? I think this is a key. So absolutely.

SPEAKER 1: So in my dissertation, I'm highlighting five areas of discipleship. The first one is worship and then study -- I'm sorry worship and then fellowship and then study and then service and then outreach. It's those five. And with Wednesday night study, I feel like maybe in "John's" group, worship was a part of it because I think there was some singing involved.

SPEAKER 8: Always.

SPEAKER 1: But the attempt was really to hit fellowship, the study and the service. The service is in that you've got people who are giving their time to lead. You've got people in the kitchen who were cooking. A lot of people helped put up tables and chairs. Everybody just, kind of, pitched in to do things, and so those three areas of our discipleship were the areas we were trying to hit.

So to that point -- and you're right. People that are plugged in on things like this on a regular basis are usually the ones that are -- really have bought into the life of the church and bought into growing as a disciple.

SPEAKER 2: Probably 15 years ago, I was not nearly as plugged into the church, and we came to the disciple class that "Jane" taught. It was an intensive class for, I don't know, ten months or whatever. "Jane" taught it. We were there, the "Does" were there. There was a whole bunch of people that really got engaged in the church after coming to that class. So I mean, it's a gateway, right?

SPEAKER 3: How long -- was that a ten-month? Did we do that for ---

SPEAKER 2: It was, like, a ten-month class. I can't remember the details.

SPEAKER 9: We took disciple too, but I don't remember it being that long.

SPEAKER 8: No, I think it was three or six months, something like that.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, this one was -- I don't know. I think it was ten. I'm not quite certain. My memory is bad.

SPEAKER 9: And "Jane" was teaching it, but that was ---

SPEAKER 8: "Jane" was teaching it, too.

SPEAKER 2: "Jane," yep.

SPEAKER 3: But you did Disciple 2.

SPEAKER 8: No, we did Disciple 1.

SPEAKER 3: Disciple 1?

SPEAKER 8: Uh-huh (yes).

SPEAKER 2: There was a red book, and it was in this room.

SPEAKER 8: It was back there in ---

SPEAKER 2: We were in this room for sure, I remember, when we did it.

SPEAKER 8: A different class.

SPEAKER 9: We were in the library.

SPEAKER 1: Well, just as a sneak peek, we're doing for the next -- for the coming up Wednesday Night Together, it's going to start on February 21st which is the week after Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday, if you're looking for something really romantic to do on Valentine's Day, you know, come to our Ash Wednesday service.

So we're going to start our Wednesday Night Together on the 21st, a week later, and it will be ten weeks. We're going to take a two-week break for Easter, so the week of

Holy Week and then the Wednesday after Easter, we'll take those two Wednesdays off, but otherwise, it will be ten weeks of study.

And we're going to do different classes. So it's not we're all doing the same thing. It will be different. "John" is going to teach on -- did you say the "I Am" statements? Is that solid yet, or is that...

SPEAKER 2: You know, I -- after we had -- I think I'm going to do something on orphans and foster care. That's what was -- I was requested to do.

SPEAKER 10: Will you record it, please?

SPEAKER 2: Oh, you'll come, right?

SPEAKER 10: I'll be with him.

SPEAKER 2: No, you come teach with me. No -- yeah, we'll do something, but that's -- I haven't started it yet. I think that's what we're going to do.

SPEAKER 1: That's -- I love it.

SPEAKER 3: So you'll take -- each of us would go into one class with one teacher for the whole time?

SPEAKER 1: Yeah -- or you -- you can change. I'll be teaching on the book of Hebrews. I think "John" is going to teach a class kind of connecting -- of course, Hebrews does this too, but his is called Cradle to Casket or Grave ---

SPEAKER 10: That sounds right, maybe.

SPEAKER 1: Cat in the casket to cradle or -- I can't remember exactly the title.

SPEAKER 2: Cat's in the cradle?

SPEAKER 1: Yeah.

SPEAKER 2: I like that. It's a good one.

SPEAKER 1: I can't remember exactly what it's called, but it's essentially the looking for Christ in the Old Testament and seeing the Old Testament -- seeing the New Testament in the Old Testament concealed, and the Old Testament in the New Testament revealed. That kind of idea. And then -- those three classes. There may be one other one.

So anyway, that's what we're planning to do next time. So it won't be a churchwide group study. It'll just be Wednesday Night Together for dinner and then various studies. And people -- we're hope -- we'll probably do registration just so we know how many people are planning to come to each class so we can assign what room, you know, to come to.

SPEAKER 2: What made that a churchwide study? Because you were preaching on Sundays? What -- why do you consider that a churchwide, what we just did, and not the spring? I'm curious what differentiates the two between? Where are you drawing the line?

SPEAKER 1: Because on Wednesday night, we were all doing the same study.

SPEAKER 2: Oh, because we were all doing the Blackaby study. Okay, got you.

SPEAKER 1: Right, yeah. So in the spring, we'll have different classes that people can choose from.

SPEAKER 2: I'm with you now.

SPEAKER 1: So it's not -- we're not all doing the same thing.

SPEAKER 2: Okay. I was just thinking ---

SPEAKER 8: But it's churchwide in terms of everybody's invited.

SPEAKER 1: Yes.

SPEAKER 2: That's what I was thinking. That's where my head was.

SPEAKER 8: I was kind of there, too.

SPEAKER 3: Will there be homework or workbook or things like that?

SPEAKER 1: No. Probably -- if there is, it won't be nearly as intense as this. I can't speak for the other classes.

SPEAKER 2: I think "John" brought -- you brought your version, right? Show him the workbook?

SPEAKER 4: Oh, I brought my Bible.

SPEAKER 10: You know, I feel like that will be refreshing, you know, coming and being able to choose a different class. But then also, like you said, so many people are involved in different

Bible studies. To be able to show up -- like, we can pour in at home more into Hebrews or whatever we're studying or, you know, go and research whatever it is that you're sharing. And we can put a lot into it, but then -- but we don't have to, either, if we're already studying something else. So I think that's refreshing for a season.

SPEAKER 1: Just a couple of more questions, and we'll wrap it up. We really already looked at Number 13 just now. But Number 12 is what would you change about Wednesday Night Together study to make it more effective, more substantive? We already talked about nametags. We talked about round tables for dinner. We talked about maybe switching the groups a little bit, which, of course, we're not -- we won't be doing that in the spring. So that's that's not as relevant.

How would you -- what would you change about Wednesday Night Together to make it a little more appealing/inviting to more people? Anything? It's perfect as it is?

SPEAKER 6: Well, you'd almost have to ask the people who aren't coming. I mean, you've got, sort of -- the people around this table have, sort of, bought into it, because we were still doing it after 12 weeks.

SPEAKER 2: I thought attrition was relatively low, but I could be wrong. Again, the one night had the five people, but other than that, I thought it was pretty well attended. So I don't know if you have any statistics on how much attrition?

SPEAKER 1: Well, we do. Of the 150 people, there were at least ten percent of that that never showed up to one.

SPEAKER 2: Got you.

SPEAKER 1: You know, who signed up but just never -- never came. Or they signed up, and they were upstairs in the kitchen and just never really got involved in the study. So there was that. And then, I can't really speak to all of the attrition.

SPEAKER 2: You did see, I'm sure, you know, I would have, like, I think it was "Jane Doe." I had "Jane Doe's" name on the list. Here comes "John." There were couples that came that only one signed up, which was fine, but I didn't know if you really had more than 150 when you started counting heads.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah. There were a few of those.

SPEAKER 2: You know what I mean? Because I saw -- I had -- I wrote in several names several times.

SPEAKER 3: Yeah, you did.

SPEAKER 2: Right? So it was good.

SPEAKER 9: Yeah, there were a lot of write-ins.

SPEAKER 4: I think the most important -- I mean, I don't know if I necessarily have any real judgment or anything to add on what was actually done week to week, because I feel like, number 1, it was a little bit, kind of, shaking the cobwebs off.

SPEAKER 1: Yeah, yeah.

SPEAKER 4: You guys are still new. You know, my wife grew up in the church, but I'm relatively new here and all that stuff. I think the most important thing, though, is just to keep doing it.

SPEAKER 7: Yeah.

SPEAKER 4: Because I think that, you know, psychologically, if you don't have to ask yourself, like, oh, is there Wednesday night tonight? You know, I don't remember -- you know, you're already in the mood of going and all that stuff. And I think just kind of knowing that the church is active in a way where every week, you know, at church on Sunday, we're going to say, hey, remember we're doing this on Wednesday. We'll see you guys there. I feel like that would probably be the most important thing just to keep going. Just the sense of inertia.

SPEAKER 3: That's a good point.

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 1: Let's see. Would you consider attending another different Wednesday night class that was not a churchwide study. I didn't ask you if you'd consider, so would you?

SPEAKER 5: Yes.

OVERALL GROUP: (General agreement).

SPEAKER 1: Are you currently engaged in any other regular Bible study or Sunday School class with Bethel or otherwise? Now, you said you're already involved in three.

SPEAKER 3: Right. I'm not going to do that again.

SPEAKER 1: Let's go around the table. I'm interested in the statistics here.

SPEAKER 5: I'm involved in a personal Bible study every day. What I do right now, and have done for a number of years, I do the Bible studies that are offered by Proverbs 31 Ministries. And most of the time, those studies are a book at a time. But right now, for Advent, we're looking at the life of Christ and the Advent story as it's told across the four Gospels. So, you know, I have a Bible study going all the time.

SPEAKER 1: So is that -- and just to be clear, I'm looking for is that something where you meet with other people?

SPEAKER 5: No.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. what about meeting with other people? Sunday school or Bible study or otherwise where you meet together with other people for the express purpose of studying?

SPEAKER 5: No. I just have a personal study going all the time.

SPEAKER 6: But a comment -- a follow-up to that, however, is because the choir practices on Sunday morning, she can't come to a Sunday School. So having a Wednesday night Bible study is immensely helpful to fill in that gap or adding that to the resume.

SPEAKER 5: You'd be amazed. I love choir. I've sang in choir for probably going on six decades. But it can cramp your style.

SPEAKER 1: How about you? Are you ---

SPEAKER 6: I actually am. I'm attending -- I'm going to call it "John's" class. I know it's not really his class, but he's been the teacher for most of the Sundays I've been there. So I'm attending that regularly and thoroughly enjoying that. And I want to make a mention related to that. I'm in that class largely because "John," who's one of our neighbors said, "Why don't you come to this Sunday school class I'm going to?"

SPEAKER 1: Personal invitation.

SPEAKER 6: Personal invitation. That's where I was going with this. We're here -- at least from my perspective, we're at Bethel in large part because "Jane," who's our neighbor, in the nature of things, you talk about things, and she made it a point -- when found out we're Presbyterians, she made it a point to invite us. And more than once. So I can't -- particularly if somebody's who's out of someplace he's been living for all of 40 years, without having to make a decision, the personal invitations, to somebody like me at least, are huge.

SPEAKER 3: I do three. I'm not going to do three again.

SPEAKER 7: I do so many now. My wife and I actually do a lot of -- she and I are doing this -- it's almost like Experiencing God. I cannot remember the name of it, though, but it's actually a woman's study, and I was like, I'll do with you, so we've been doing that every day. She and I are also reading Luke, the book of Luke, so we're going through all the different books there. And then I do the men's hour -- I catch up with you from -- or try to on Fridays. So yeah, it's...

SPEAKER 2: Is it Beth Moore study? Just curious. The woman's?

SPEAKER 7: I think so. I can't remember.

SPEAKER 3: Is it -- does it start with a video?

SPEAKER 7: No, this -- my wife just bought the book. She was like, we -- we're going to do this. I said let's do it. And then I looked at it, and I was like, this is a woman's study. She was like, it doesn't matter. I go, you're right.

SPEAKER 8: We attend Mosaics, so in terms of church here, it's Mosaics, and then an individual, you know, every morning. So that's a personal discipline that I enjoy and do that without fail. It's the first thing I do in the morning.

SPEAKER 9: Yeah, with Mosaics, we're studying the book of Matthew. I've -- you know, just going all the way through the Bible and certain sections of Matthew. And in Circle, it's only once a month, but it is a Bible study. It might be what you and your wife are doing. It's "It's All Under

Control." Is that what your book is, "It's All Under Control"? And that was a lot like Experiencing God.

SPEAKER 7: That might be it.

SPEAKER 9: It goes along with it, but it...

SPEAKER 3: "It's All Under Control"?

SPEAKER 9: "It's All Under Control." I wrote it down so I could remember it.

SPEAKER 3: I like the title.

SPEAKER 9: It's a Bible study, and there's another book that goes along with it. And I can't think of the lady's name that wrote it.

SPEAKER 10: I can't think of her name, either.

SPEAKER 9: But anyway, once a month. That's not a lot, but we aren't going to have December, so...

SPEAKER 4: I'm not. I go to the Sunday School most of the time. We haven't gone the last couple of weeks so I've called my bluff a little bit, but before that, we were going pretty often.

SPEAKER 10: And that's the new young adult class, right? Is that the one that you all go to?

SPEAKER 4: Maybe we haven't been in a little while, because I that it was usually like "John Doe" was teaching it.

SPEAKER 2: Mosaic, probably. In this room.

SPEAKER 1: That's the old young adult class who thinks they're still young.

SPEAKER 4: Is that still -- sorry, I was... I don't know how old everyone is.

SPEAKER 10: "John Doe" is teaching one now. "John" and then ---

SPEAKER 1: "John."

SPEAKER 10: And "John" and "Jane Doe."

SPEAKER 1: They meet in the conference room.

SPEAKER 10: I think they moved into the conference room, but yeah.

SPEAKER 2: I've taught Logos/Acts for many years. I'm kind of on a break from teaching right now. But I'm getting ready to start -- honestly, I'm pretty excited about it. My best friend at work, we're going to go through Blackaby again together.

SPEAKER 1: All right.

SPEAKER 10: That's awesome.

SPEAKER 2: We go on Tuesday mornings, and we're going to do that. Sean gave me -- there was one book that somebody wrote in once and left it here. So he gave it to me, so we're going to start that. Pretty excited about that.

SPEAKER 10: That's super. That's great. So, yeah, currently I am -- I go to Mosaic when I'm not talking to someone the whole Sunday School hour. That happens sometimes. And then I have the Circle. I'm doing that study.

And then, yeah, I started reading through Luke at home just in my personal study. That's something -- as much as I love -- so we've walked through Experiencing God three times now, and as much as I love it, I'm kind of excited just to be back in the Word again. Just because -- and I know, like you have shared before, how you would have your time of Bible study and then do Experiencing God. I don't have that kind of time to do all of that so -- or a little bit, but anyway, so I just love just being in the word again and reading through a book as a whole, you know, in the Bible.

SPEAKER 3: Right.

SPEAKER 7: I'm surprised you didn't say, well, I'm married to a pastor, so...

SPEAKER 1: You know, it's interesting, to that point, and I'm curious, "John," what your take is, because I find myself -- in most of the studies that I get involved in, I'm usually the teacher and not the student.

And I find myself needing to go to podcasts and needing to -- you know, I do get together with other pastors, but it's not every week. It's more like every month, and when we do that, we're not doing it to study the Bible together, you know.

So my answer -- if I had to answer this question, it would be no. I'm not in a class for my own personal study with other peers. But I do find that nourishment in other places. I think that's the ---

SPEAKER 2: Yeah, I mean, when Bill Cain left, "John" and I tag-teamed until we got our interim. And I was teaching Sunday school and preaching every other week, and honestly, I got into a rut where I was spending all my time just studying, right? I mean, deeply studying, not the -- you know, it wasn't the relational connection as much as it was, like, I'm in Luke for a purpose, because I want to preach on it.

And so I kind of had to back out of that after a little while, because it's like, I don't -- I'm sure you know what I'm saying, right?

You're there for a purpose, and you have to be there to do what you're going to do, and you spend so much time there that you kind of -- that's why I liked Blackaby so much is like, you know, it was so much singular on God.

And it's not the blessings of God; it's God. You know what I mean? It's Christ. It's the Spirit. It's not the blessings. And so when I get too deep in the study and then for a purpose, I kind of lose some of that at times, so I need to back up.

SPEAKER 1: That's good. Well, any final thoughts? We've gone over an hour, now. So any final thoughts on the study? On the whole evening as a whole as a part of our discipleship process here at Bethel? Like I said, when I say discipleship process, I want to see people engaged in all five of those areas of discipleship. Worship, of course. Worship and then fellowship. We -- we need to have friends.

When I say fellowship, I'm just talking about let's eat together. Let's get around a table. Let's go on men's retreats. Let's -- you know, let's do things together. Let's go for a walk together, you know. Let's build friendships. That's really what fellowship is about.

Going back to worship, having that personal relationship with Christ, that's the very center of our worship, but then meeting together for worship services and then fellowship. And then study, having a place -- you know, the church providing platforms for people to engage in study together.

And then service, having places where we put our hands and feet to the task where we're in the kitchen, or we're working on workdays, or we're serving as a deacon or an elder or a Sunday school teacher or a choir member or all the various ways that we can serve.

And then outreach, of course, going outside of the walls of the church under the banner of Christ, not under the banner of Bethel, to say, you know, we're here. We want to bring the good news of the gospel of the kingdom to -- to the world. And so my aim is to see all of our people have -- be growing in all five of those areas. And I think if we all, kind of, took a survey of ourselves, an honest survey, there's some of those where we're really strong.

We're here at worship every week, you know, and then, you know, we're -- maybe we've got the fellowship down, and maybe just we'd never go out and outreach. Or maybe we're not serving in some way. Or maybe we're doing all those things, and we're not really involved in a study. So my aim is to see all of our people really add onto that process and grow in those five areas.

SPEAKER 3: I would like to see us be -- develop relationships with other churches. I say this having just recently come to a conclusion that I have missed that in my spiritual experience. I live at the Pines, which is a retirement facility, and I don't like to be too far away from my husband. And so I didn't like coming to Bible studies that were here.

A friend invited me to a Bible study at DCPC near me. I went. I've loved it. They've embraced me. I see commonality. I see differences. It's been a positive experience for me, and I think for them too. I'm not the only one there who is not a Bethel [sic] member.

Years ago, I had a similar experience in working with Loaves and Fishes when we do the -- what is it called? The walk is in October.

SPEAKER 1: The crop walk?

SPEAKER 3: The crop walk. We do crop walk, and we'd take our youth, and they would all intermingle with other youth. And I thought that was a good experience for them. I'd like to see

Bethel not close itself to relationships with other churches, not necessarily Presbyterian, not necessarily white. I think we need that.

SPEAKER 1: (Nods head up and down.)

SPEAKER 3: We would be better for it.

SPEAKER 6: Well, we have an occasion for that coming up.

SPEAKER 3: You do? What is it?

SPEAKER 5: Yes, the cantata.

SPEAKER 3: Yes, right. You all are seeing with Mount Zion, are you not?

SPEAKER 5: We will sing with Mount Zion during the worship hour, and then they will come here at 3:00.

SPEAKER 1: Our Thanksgiving service too this year.

SPEAKER 3: Yes, I was there. It was wonderful, yes. I just think that's -- I think the community is better when we worship together some.

SPEAKER 6: I want to make one observation, if you don't mind. Over the past few years, I've participated or seen several surveys attendance/ membership dropping in the church. What's doing it, why, what to do about it. And consistently, one of the things that they touch on is getting outside of that -- the younger generation, children, grandchildren. They don't restrict it to the one hour on Sunday morning.

And it sounds -- it seems to me that Bethel is going in the right direction by trying to not diminish worship, but there's just a different mindset in the younger generation, and they don't -- they may not -- there's other ways of doing church, I think is the phrase. It strikes me as a healthy church, a church is maybe scratching where a lot of people itch. It certainly has for "Jane" and me.

SPEAKER 10: I was just -- in response to your comment -- it's hard not saying names. Just with -- since we've been here, we've noticed, like, with his pastor covenant group, like, he gets together with so many pastors from different denominations. That's really refreshing to us. And then the Thanksgiving service that it was so many different denominations.

I'm just really blessed to see that and to see -- it seems like the Lake Norman area wants to get together and wants to -- like, even just like at the Christmas in Davidson, all the Christmas trees with the nonprofits. I thought that's pretty neat that, like, just the support of nonprofits. And it just seems like there's a built-in outreach in the community.

SPEAKER 3: I agree.

SPEAKER 1: Okay. Anything else? Thank you guys so much for this. I think there's some good material here to work with. Like I said, it's not just for my dissertation. It is part of that, but also for, really -- my dissertation is intended to be a blessing to Bethel, you know, to build up the discipleship. It's our mission. It's what Jesus told us to do: Go make disciples. And as a church, that becomes the center of our purpose. So everything we do should flow out of that purpose.

SPEAKER 10: And I was going to say, and please pray for him as he wraps it up.

APPENDIX C

HISTORY OF BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

America had fought the Revolutionary War; the War of 1812. Andrew Jackson was elected President of the US in 1828.

The same year Jackson became president, the people of what is now the Bethel Community decided there should be a church in their area. Traveling to Hopewell, Center, and Ramah churches on poor roads was difficult. Women and children were often unable to attend church. It was decided that a Presbyterian church should be organized in their vicinity.

January 8, 1829 was the first verified meeting of the Bethel congregation. In July 1829 Thomas Espy became the first official minister to accept a call to Bethel. The first election of elders took place in September 1829 – Patrick Johnston, Robert Potts, Alexander Brevard Jetton, Charles Mitchell. That same year a rock wall was built around the area designated as the cemetery. A preaching stand was built in a grove of trees.

The first church building was erected in 1830. Members donated lumber. Slaves and members built a frame building which stood near the front of the present sanctuary. At this time the membership totaled 90. Leaders of the congregational singing stood on two small platforms on either side of the pulpit. Tuning forks were used to set the pitch. The minister sat on a red horse-hair sofa behind the pulpit. A gallery for slaves extended across the rear of the church.

August 29, 1835 was the first known burial in the church cemetery – Hannah E Knox and Elizabeth Jetton. That same year eighteen African American infants were baptized in the church. In later years, twenty-three African Americans were baptized.

As Bethel grew, one member made a significant contribution which would return to Bethel many times. Colonel William Lee Davidson, in honor of his father General William Lee Davidson, donated part of his plantation for the establishment of a Presbyterian College. In 1837 Davidson College opened its doors.

The election and ordination of the first deacons, S.M. Withers and John R. Knox took place in 1856.

In May 1857 during the ministry of Rev. E. D. Junkins, the required Communion tokens were discarded. Previously, it was necessary for members to attend a Friday evening or Saturday morning service of self-examination and resolve. Tokens given out at these services were required at the Sunday service if one wished to partake in Communion.

Regular collections increased as the needs of the church grew. By 1858 six annual collections were taken.

In 1858 Abraham Lincoln predicted that a house divided against itself could not stand, that a government could not endure permanently half slave and half free. Lincoln took office on

March 4, 1861. The Civil War began on April 12, 1861. In May of 1862 Rev. R.B. Anderson, having served a year at Bethel, was granted a leave of absence to serve as an army chaplain.

During the 1870's, the beginnings of big business flourished in the North; the painful process of reconstruction began in the South. As the expanding nation moved westward on rails, a time of dedicated planning and work began at Bethel. Rev. L.K. Glasgow was installed in 1879. During his time as pastor, Rev. Glasgow taught at Bethel Academy, a private school for young men and women. The first manse was built in 1878 on land two miles southwest of the church. Mrs. Mag Williams donated the land. Rev. Glasgow and his family along with several boarding students of the Bethel Academy occupied the nine-room manse.

In 1890 Bethel transferred from the Concord into the Mecklenburg Presbytery. At a July congregational meeting in 1895 the congregation resolved to build a new church. "After the crops were laid by" male members and friends of the community met and made brick. By March 1896 the main part of the work was complete, though seats were still at the lumber mill. Hand made brick from the kiln of R.J.W. Knox were used for the inside walls. Hard bricks were hauled by wagon teams from a kiln east of Mooresville. Dr. J.M. Grier designed the new sanctuary which was 60' by 40' and had one door in the center front. Five arched windows were on each side. The pulpit, still in use today, has an interesting tale to tell. According to former missionary member, Bess Knox, Rev. Grier gave each member a dime to invest in chickens. The profit from this investment was to go toward the purchase of a pulpit. Dr. Grier no doubt added to the total, records indicate Dr. Grier donated the pulpit! The first service in the new sanctuary was held on January 17, 1896. In 1906 after nearly fourteen years of dedicated service, Dr. Grier concluded his work at Bethel.

Woodrow Wilson, a former student of Davidson College, was elected President of the United States in 1912.

The Roaring Twenties, the days of Babe Ruth, Jack Dempsey, Jazz and Prohibition were ushered in with the administration of Warren Harding. Presbytery met at Bethel for the third time in 1923. In 1928 Bethel was 100 years old. Six hundred and twenty-one people attended the celebration.

The Depression of the 1930's disrupted the lives of most Americans. Despite this, Bethel was faithful in her stewardship. The offering of each first Sunday was given to Barium Springs Orphanage. In 1939 a community house, "the hut" as it's known today, was constructed by the men of the congregation. The intermediate girls and Women's Auxiliary, along with individuals who made donations, helped equip the new building.

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, American was thrust into World War II. Gasoline and tires were in short supply. Vacation Bible School was not held in 1942 or 1943. On V.J. Day, 1945, there were 45 names on the Service Roll. All returned except one. During the hot dry days of August 1948 men laid a hardwood floor in the sanctuary. A new brick Sunday School building to the rear of the Sanctuary was constructed in 1949.

June 1, 1951, John Edwin Wayland, Jr. began as a supply minister. Rev. J.E. Wayland, Sr. assisted in the installation of his son as pastor on July 27, 1952. With a new pastor came a period of

growth. Mrs. Betty Jetton became the first recipient of the Women's Honorary Life Membership on July 19, 1953. In 1955 a front vestibule was added.

On the last day of December 1961, the Congregation voted to incorporate the Apostles Creed into the morning worship. In 1963 Lake Norman began to fill. This brought an influx of new members to the Bethel family. A new educational building was completed in 1967.

It may be a fruitful exercise to consider the example of those who have walked before us. As we do, we find that they have been "faithful in their worship; that they have given generously and lovingly to the support of the church; that they have served God in their daily work; that they have shared their gifts of the Spirit, their time and their possessions with those in need." They have been hospitable to the stranger, and they have taken seriously their responsibility in nurturing the children in the Christian faith. They laughed and played, cried and prayed together. They have loved God, served him humbly and strengthened the ties of love one for another.

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Rev. Aaron C. Moore

Profile

Passionate follower of Jesus Christ. Ordained pastor in the Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians (ECO). Dedicated to discipleship, spiritual development, and outreach. Lover of family, outdoors, music, cooking and reading. Devoted husband of 24 years and father of three young men and one beautiful daughter.

Professional Experience

MINISTRY/LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

- Weekly preaching and Bible teaching
- Administration of sacraments, counseling, visitation, prayer ministry, assimilation, weddings, and funerals
- Leadership development with officers and new Covenant Partners (new members)
- Israel pilgrimage leader
- Local, regional, and international mission team leader
- Experienced youth & young adult ministry, and coordination of church-wide small groups ministry
- Experienced music and worship ministry direction- band, praise team, orchestra, handbells, and chancel choir

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

- Moderator of Session, ex officio member of all ministry teams
- Head of Staff, currently five full-time, four part-time staff, weekly meetings, administrative and program oversight, annual reviews
- Served Pastoral Ministry Ordination Team in East Central Presbytery, the Ministry Partnership and Global Mission Teams in the Presbytery of the South, and as an ECO ordination exam grader
- Vision casting, content development, and program implementation
- Careful management and oversight of annual budgets (currently \$1.2m) and stewardship campaign

Employment History

- BETHEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – Cornelius, NC
 - Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, February 2023 to Present
- EASTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – Marietta, GA
 - Senior Pastor/Head of Staff, June 2017 to 2023
- ALBEMARLE ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH – Charlotte, NC
 - Associate Pastor of Music and Youth September 2013 to June 2017
- GRACE COMMUNITY CHURCH – Boca Raton, FL
 - Director of Music and Adult Equipping Ministries, June 2008 to August 2013
- MOORE QUALITY FLOORING – Kernersville, NC
 - Owner/Operator, April 2006 to June 2008

Education History

- GORDON CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, 2020-2024 – Charlotte, NC
Doctor of Ministry Student, Discipleship and Outreach (Anticipated Graduation, May 2024)
- THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – Louisville, KY
Master of Theology, Christian Missions, 2019
- KNOX THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – Fort Lauderdale, FL
Master of Divinity, Christianity and Culture, Magna Cum Laude, 2014
- GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY – Boiling Springs, NC
Bachelor of Arts Degree, Music Composition, 2002